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PLAYS FOR AN IRISH THEATRE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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IN PREPARATION.

RED HANRAHAN; THE SECRET ROSE.

PLAYS FOR AN IRISH THEATRE

BY

W. B. YEATS

WITH DESIGNS BY GORDON CRAIG

DEIRDRE
THE GREEN HELMET
ON BAILE'S STRAND
THE KING'S THRESHOLD
THE SHADOWY WATERS
THE HOUR-GLASS
CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

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PREFACE.

In poetical drama there is, it is held, an antithesis between drama and lyric poetry, for lyric poetry however much it move you when read out of a book can, as these critics think, but encumber the action. Yet when we go back a few centuries and enter the great periods of drama, character grows less and sometimes disappears, and there is much lyric feeling, and at times a lyric measure will be wrought into the dialogue, a flowing measure that had well befitted music, or that more lumbering one of the sonnet. Suddenly it strikes us that character is continuously present in comedy alone, and that there is much tragedy, that of Corneille, that of Racine, that of Greece and Rome, where its place is taken by passions and motives, one person being jealous, another full of love or remorse or pride or anger. In writers of tragi-comedy (and Shakespeare is always a writer of tragi-comedy) there is indeed character, but we notice that it is in the moments of comedy that character is defined, in Hamlet's gaiety let us say; while amid the great moments, when Timon orders his tomb, when Hamlet cries to Horatio 'Absent thee from felicity awhile', when Anthony names 'Of many thousand kisses the poor last' all is lyricism, unmixed passion, 'the integrity of fire'. Nor does character ever attain to complete definition in these lamps ready for the taper, no matter how circumstantial and gradual the opening of events, as

it does in Falstaff who has no passionate purpose to fulfil, or as it does in Henry the Fifth whose poetry, never touched by lyric heat, is oratorical; nor when the tragic reverie is at its height do we say 'How well that man is realised! I should know him were I to meet him in the street', for it is always ourselves that we see upon the stage, and should it be a tragedy of love we renew, it may be, some loyalty of our youth, and go from the theatre with our eyes dim for an old love's sake.

I think it was while rehearsing a translation of *Les Fourberies de Scapin* in Dublin, and noticing how passionless it all was, that I saw what should have been plain from the first line I had written, that tragedy must always be a drowning and breaking of the dykes that separate man from man, and that it is upon these dykes comedy keeps house. But I was not certain of the site (one always doubts when one knows no testimony but one's own); till somebody told me of a certain letter of Congreve's. He describes the external and superficial expressions of 'humour' on which farce is founded and then defines 'humour' itself, the foundation of comedy, as 'a singular and unavoidable way of doing anything peculiar to one man only, by which his speech and actions are distinguished from all other men' and adds to it that 'passions are too powerful in the sex to let humour have its course', or as I would rather put it, that you can find but little of what we call character in unspoiled youth, whatever be the sex, for, as he indeed shows in another sentence, it grows with time like the ash of a burning stick, and strengthens towards middle life till there is little else at seventy years.

Since then I have discovered an antagonism between all the old art and our new art of comedy and understand

why I hated at nineteen years Thackeray's novels and the new French painting. A big picture of cocottes sitting at little tables outside a Café, by some follower of Manet's, was exhibited at the Royal Hibernian Academy while I was a student at a life class there, and I was miserable for days. I found no desirable place, no man I could have wished to be, no woman I could have loved, no Golden Age, no lure for secret hope, no adventure with myself for theme out of that endless tale I told myself all day long. Years after I saw the Olympia of Manet at the Luxembourg and watched it without hostility indeed, but as I might some incomparable talker whose precision of gesture gave me pleasure, though I did not understand his language. I returned to it again and again at intervals of years, saying to myself 'some day I will understand'; and yet it was not until Sir Hugh Lane brought the Eva Gonzales to Dublin, and I had said to myself 'How perfectly that woman is realized as distinct from all other women that have lived or shall live!' that I understood I was carrying on in my own mind that quarrel between a tragedian and a comedian which the Devil on Two Sticks showed to the young man who had climbed through the window.

There is an art of the flood, the art of Titian when his Ariosto and his Bacchus and Ariadne give new images to the dreams of youth, and of Shakespeare when he shows us Hamlet broken away from life by the passionate hesitations of his reverie. And we call this art poetical, because we must bring more to it than our daily mood if we would take our pleasure; and because it delights in picturing the moment of exaltation, of excitement, of dreaming (or the capacity for it, as in that still face of Ariosto's that is like some vessel soon to

be full of wine). And there is an art that we call real, because character can only express itself perfectly in a real world, being that world's creature, and because we understand it best through a delicate discrimination of the senses, which is but entire wakefulness, the daily mood grown cold and crystalline. . . .

We may not find either mood in its purity, but in mainly tragic art one distinguishes devices to exclude or lessen character, to diminish the power of that daily mood, to cheat or blind its too clear perception. If the real world is not altogether rejected it is but touched here and there, and into the places we have left empty we summon rhythm, balance, pattern, images that remind us of vast passions, the vagueness of past times, all the chimeras that haunt the edge of trance; and if we are painters, we shall express personal emotion through ideal form, a symbolism handled by the generations, a mask from whose eyes the disembodied looks, a style that remembers many masters, that it may escape contemporary suggestion; or we shall leave out some element of reality as in Byzantine painting, where there is no mass, nothing in relief; so it is that in the supreme moment of tragic art there comes upon one that strange sensation as though the hair of one's head stood up. And when we love, if it be in the excitement of youth, do we not also, that the flood may find no wall to narrow, no stone to convulse it, exclude character or the signs of it by choosing that beauty which seems unearthly because the individual woman is lost amid the labyrinth of its lines as though life were trembling into stillness and silence, or at last folding itself away? Some little irrelevance of line, some promise of character to come, may indeed put us at our ease, 'give more interest' as the humour

of the old man with the basket does to Cleopatra's dying; but should it come as we had dreamed in love's frenzy to our dying for that woman's sake, we would find that the discord had its value from the tune.

Certainly we have here the Tree of Life and that of the Knowledge of Good and Evil which is rooted in our interests and if we have forgotten their differing virtues, it is surely because we have taken delight in a confusion of crossing branches. Tragic art, passionate art, the drowner of dykes, the confounder of understanding, moves us by setting us to reverie, by alluring us almost to the intensity of trance. The persons upon the stage, let us say, greaten till they are humanity itself. We feel our minds expand convulsively or spread out slowly like some moon-brightened image-crowded sea. That which is before our eyes perpetually vanishes and returns again in the midst of the excitement it creates, and the more enthralling it is the more do we forget it. When I am watching my own *Deirdre* I am content with the players and myself, if I am moved for a while not by the contrasted sorrows of Deirdre and Naisi, but because the words have called up before me the image of the sea-born woman so distinctly that Deirdre seems by contrast to those unshaken eyelids that had but the sea's cold blood what I had wished her to seem, a wild bird in a cage.

It was only by watching my own plays that I came to understand that this reverie, this twilight between sleep and waking, this bout of fencing, alike on the stage and in the mind, between man and phantom, this perilous path as on the edge of a sword, is the condition of tragic pleasure, and to understand why it is so rare and so brief. If an actor becomes over emphatic, picking

out what he believes to be the important words with violence, and running up and down the scale, or if he stresses his lines in wrong places, or even if an electric lamp that should have cast but a reflected light from sky or sea, shows from behind the post of a door, I discover at once the proud fragility of dreams.

At first I was driven into teaching too statuesque a pose, too monotonous a delivery, that I might not put 'vitality' in the place of the sleep walking of passion, and for the rest became a little deaf and blind.

But alas! it is often my own words that break the dream. Then I take the play from the stage and write it over again, perhaps many times. At first I always believed it must be something in the management of events, in all that is the same in prose or verse, that was wrong, but after I had reconstructed a scene with the messenger in *Deirdre* in many ways, I discovered that my language must keep at all times a certain even richness. I had used 'traitor', 'sword', 'suborned,' words of a too traditional usage, without plunging them into personal thought and metaphor, and I had forgotten in a moment of melodrama that tragic drama must be carved out of speech as a statue is out of stone.

But train our players and our mechanists as we will and if we have not thought out the art of stage decoration afresh every brush stroke of our scene painter will mix into the reverie the meretricious or the irrelevant. We shall have hired some journeyman to accompany the poet's description with a painted landscape which, because it must give all to the first glance and yet copy nature, will alone copy what is obvious, and which even if it could keep the attention and give it pleasure could but keep it to the poet's loss:—

'A vapour, sometime, like a bear, or lion,
A tower'd citadel, a pendant rock,
A forked mountain, or blue promontory
With trees upon't that nod unto the world
And mock our eyes with air.'

I have heard Anthony speak those lines before a painted cloth that, though it could not make them nothing, left in the memory the sensation of something childish, theatrical as we say. Words as solemn, and having more for the mind's eye than those of the Book of Common Prayer are spoken where no reformer has cast out the idolatrous mummery and no tradition sanctified.

In no art can we do well unless we keep to those effects that are peculiar to it or it can show better than the other arts. We no longer paint wood with a grain that is not its own, but are content that it should display itself or be covered with paint that pretends to be but paint, and if we make a design for a vase or a plate, we are careful not to attempt something that can be better done in an easel picture. But in the art of the theatre we imitate an easel picture even though we ignore or mar for its sake the elements we should have worked in, the characteristics of the stage, light and shadow, speech, the movement of the players. Our tree-wings . . . let us say . . . can only be given mass and detail by painted light and shadow and these will contradict, or be in no relation to the real light, and this real light will be so cut up and cut off by wings and borders arranged for effects of painting that we shall be content to use it in but a few obvious ways. Then too our background will be full of forms and colours, instead of showing an even or almost even surface whereon the

players are outlined clearly that we may see their movements and feel their importance; and all the while the background, even if it were fine painting and had no false light and shadow and did not reduce the players to a picturesque group in the foreground of a water colour painting by my grandmother, could but insist on the unreality we are anxious to forget, for every time a player stood close to that garden scene we would but feel over again on how flat a surface they had painted that long garden walk dwindling away into the distance.

If we would give our theatre the dignity of a church, of a Greek open air theatre, of an Elizabethan platform stage, and cannot be content with any of these, we must have a scene where there is no painted light and shade, and that is but another way of saying, no realism, no objects represented in mass (unless they can be copied exactly as we can sometimes copy an interior), and the mechanism of this scene must as little as possible prevent the free and delicate use of light and shadow.

When we have made this change in obedience to a logic which has been displayed in the historical development of all the other arts, we shall have created a theatre that will please the poet and the player and the painter. An old quarrel will be ended, the stage will be beautifully decorated, every change will be full of meaning and yet never create a competing interest, or set bounds to the suggestions of speech and motion. At last liberated from the necessity of an always complete realization, the producer, recovering caprice, will be as free as a modern painter, as Signor Mancini let us say, to give himself up to an elliptical imagination. Gloster will be able to fall but from his own height and think that he has fallen from Dover cliff, and Richard's and Richmond's tents

can face one another again. We shall have made possible once more a noble, capricious, extravagant, resonant, fantastic art.

All summer I have been playing with a little model, where there is a scene capable of endless transformation, of the expression of every mood that does not require a photographic reality. Mr. Craig—who has invented all this—has permitted me to set up upon the stage of the Abbey another scene that corresponds to this, in the scale of a foot for an inch, and henceforth I shall be able, by means so simple that one laughs, to lay the events of my plays amid a grandeur like that of Babylon; and where there is neither complexity nor compromise nothing need go wrong, no lamps become suddenly unmasked, no ill-painted corner come suddenly into sight. Henceforth I can all but 'produce' my play while I write it, moving hither and thither little figures of cardboard through gay or solemn light and shade, allowing the scene to give the words and the words the scene. I am very grateful for he has banished a whole world that wearied me and was undignified and given me forms and lights upon which I can play as upon some stringed instrument.

W. B. Yeats.

P.S.

Two of Mr. Craig's designs, 'The Heroic Age—Morning', and 'The Heroic Age—Evening', are impressions worked out in Mr. Craig's scene, of the world my people move in, rather than exact pictures of any moment of a play. The one, however, suggests to me *On Baile's Strand*, and the other *Deirdre*. The design for *The Hour-Glass* shows the scene as it was

used in Dublin, and 'The Fool'—who belongs to *The Hour-Glass* and *On Baile's Strand*—is as he was in Dublin in the first play, except that we have found no one who can make us a mask of leather, and we do not yet know how to make it ourselves.

W. B. Y.

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DEIRDRE

To Mrs. Patrick Campbell

Who in the generosity of her genius has played my Deirdre in Dublin and London with the Abbey Company, as well as with her own people, ana

To Robert Gregory

who designed the beautiful scene she played it in.

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

MUSICIANS
FERGUS, *an old man*
NAISI, *a young king*
DEIRDRE, *his queen*
A DARK-FACED MESSENGER
CONCHUBAR (*pronounced* CONOCHAR), *the old King of Uladh, who is still strong and vigorous*
DARK-FACED EXECUTIONER

DEIRDRE.

SCENE: *A Guest-house in a wood. It is a rough house of timber; through the doors and some of the windows one can see the great spaces of the wood, the sky dimming, night closing in. But a window to the left shows the thick leaves of a coppice; the landscape suggests silence and loneliness. There is a door to right and left, and through the side windows one can see anybody who approaches either door, a moment before he enters. In the centre, a part of the house is curtained off; the curtains are drawn. There are unlighted torches in brackets on the walls. There is, at one side, a small table with a chessboard and chessmen upon it. At the other side of the room there is a brazier with a fire; two women, with musical instruments beside them, crouch about the brazier: they are comely women of about forty. Another woman, who carries a stringed instrument, enters hurriedly; she speaks, at first standing in the doorway.*

First Musician. I have a story right, my wanderers,
That has so mixed with fable in our songs,
That all seemed fabulous. We are come, by chance,
Into King Conchubar's country, and this house
Is an old guest-house built for travellers
From the seashore to Conchubar's royal house,
And there are certain hills among these woods,
And there Queen Deirdre grew.

Second Musician. That famous queen
Who has been wandering with her lover Naisi,
And none to friend but lovers and wild hearts?
First Mus. [*Going nearer to the brazier.*] Some dozen years ago, King Conchubar found
A house upon a hillside in this wood,
And there a comely child with an old witch
To nurse her, and there 's nobody can say
If she were human, or of those begot
By an invisible king of the air in a storm
On a king's daughter, or anything at all
Of who she was or why she was hidden there
But that she'd too much beauty for good luck.
He went up thither daily, till at last
She put on womanhood, and he lost peace,
And Deirdre's tale began. The King was old.
A month or so before the marriage day,
A young man, in the laughing scorn of his youth,
Naisi, the son of Usna, climbed up there,
And having wooed, or, as some say, been wooed,
Carried her off.
Sec. Mus. The tale were well enough
Had it a finish.
First Mus. Hush! I have more to tell;
But gather close that I may whisper it:
I speak of terrible, mysterious ends—
The secrets of a king.
Sec. Mus. There 's none to hear!
First Mus. I have been to Conchubar's house and followed up
A crowd of servants going out and in
With loads upon their heads: embroideries
To hang upon the walls, or new-mown rushes

To strew upon the floors, and came at length
To a great room.

Sec. Mus. Be silent; there are steps!

[*Enter* FERGUS, *an old man, who moves about from door to window excitedly through what follows.*

Fergus. I thought to find a message from the king.
You are musicians by these instruments,
And if as seems—for you are comely women—
You can praise love, you'll have the best of luck,
For there'll be two, before the night is in,
That bargained for their love, and paid for it
All that men value. You have but the time
To weigh a happy music with a sad;
To find what is most pleasing to a lover,
Before the son of Usna and his queen
Have passed this threshold.

First Mus. Deirdre and her man!

Fergus. I was to have found a message in this house,
And ran to meet it. Is there no messenger
From Conchubar to Fergus, son of Rogh?

First Mus. Are Deirdre and her lover tired of life?

Fergus. You are not of this country, or you'd know
That they are in my charge and all forgiven.

First Mus. We have no country but the roads of the world.

Fergus. Then you should know that all things change in the world,
And hatred turns to love and love to hate,
And even kings forgive.

First Mus. An old man's love
Who casts no second line, is hard to cure;
His jealousy is like his love.

Fergus. And that 's but true.

You have learned something in your wanderings.
He was so hard to cure, that the whole court,
But I alone, thought it impossible;
Yet after I had urged it at all seasons,
I had my way, and all's forgiven now;
And you shall speak the welcome and the joy
That I lack tongue for.

First Mus. Yet old men are jealous.

Fergus. [*Going to door.*] I am Conchubar's near friend,
and that weighed somewhat,
And it was policy to pardon them.
The need of some young, famous, popular man
To lead the troops, the murmur of the crowd,
And his own natural impulse, urged him to it.
They have been wandering half-a-dozen years.

First Mus. And yet old men are jealous.

Fergus. [*Coming from door.*] Sing the more sweetly
Because, though age is arid as a bone,
This man has flowered. I've need of music, too;
If this grey head would suffer no reproach,
I'd dance and sing—

[*Dark-faced* Men *with strange, barbaric dress and arms begin to pass by the doors and windows. They pass one by one and in silence.*]

and dance till the hour ran out,
Because I have accomplished this good deed.

First Mus. Look there—there at the window, those dark men,
With murderous and outlandish-looking arms—
They've been about the house all day.

Fergus. [*Looking after them.*] What are you?
Where do you come from, who is it sent you here?

First Mus. They will not answer you.

Fergus. They do not hear.
First Mus. Forgive my open speech, but to these eyes
That have seen many lands, they are such men
As kings will gather for a murderous task,
That neither bribes, commands, nor promises
Can bring their people to.
Fergus. And that is why
You harped upon an old man's jealousy.
A trifle sets you quaking. Conchubar's fame
Brings merchandise on every wind that blows.
They may have brought him Libyan dragon-skin,
Or the ivory of the fierce unicorn.
First Mus. If these be merchants, I have seen the goods
They have brought to Conchubar, and understood
His murderous purpose.
Fergus. Murderous, you say?
Why, what new gossip of the roads is this?
But I'll not hear.
First Mus. It may be life or death.
There is a room in Conchubar's house, and there——
Fergus. Be silent, or I'll drive you from the door.
There's many a one that would do more than that,
And make it prison, or death, or banishment
To slander the high King.
[*Suddenly restraining himself and speaking gently.*
He is my friend;
I have his oath, and I am well content.
I have known his mind as if it were my own
These many years, and there is none alive
Shall buzz against him, and I there to stop it.
I know myself, and him, and your wild thought
Fed on extravagant poetry, and lit

By such a dazzle of old fabulous tales
That common things are lost, and all that 's strange
Is true because 'twere pity if it were not.
[*Going to the door again.*
Quick! quick! your instruments! they are coming now.
I hear the hoofs a-clatter. Begin that song;
But what is it to be? I'd have them hear
A music foaming up out of the house
Like wine out of a cup. Come now, a verse
Of some old time not worth remembering,
And all the lovelier because a bubble.
Begin, begin, of some old king and queen,
Of Ludgaidh Redstripe or another; no, not him,
He and his lady perished wretchedly.

FIRST MUSICIAN. [*Singing.*]

'Why is it,' Queen Edain said,
'If I do but climb the stair . . . .

Fergus. Ah! that is better. . . . They are alighted now.
Shake all your cockscombs, children; these are lovers.
[FERGUS *goes out.*

FIRST MUSICIAN.

'Why is it,' Queen Edain said,
'If I do but climb the stair
To the tower overhead,
When the winds are calling there,
Or the gannets calling out,
In waste places of the sky,
There 's so much to think about,
That I cry, that I cry?'

SECOND MUSICIAN.

But her goodman answered her:
'Love would be a thing of naught
Had not all his limbs a stir
Born out of immoderate thought;
Were he anything by half,
Were his measure running dry.
Lovers, if they may not laugh,
Have to cry, have to cry.'

[DEIRDRE, NAISI, *and* FERGUS *have been seen for a moment through the windows, but now they have entered.*

THE THREE MUSICIANS. [*Together.*]

But is Edain worth a song
Now the hunt begins anew?
Praise the beautiful and strong;
Praise the redness of the yew;
Praise the blossoming apple-stem.
But our silence had been wise.
What is all our praise to them,
That have one another's eyes.

Deirdre. Silence your music, though I thank you for it;
But the wind 's blown upon my hair, and I
Must set the jewels on my neck and head
For one that 's coming.
Naisi. Your colour has all gone
As 'twere with fear, and there 's no cause for that.
Deirdre. These women have the raddle that they use
To make them brave and confident, although
Dread, toil, or cold may chill the blood o' their cheeks.
You'll help me, women. It is my husband's will

I show my trust in one, that may be here
Before the mind can call the colour up.
My husband took these rubies from a king
Of Surracha that was so murderous
He seemed all glittering dragon. Now wearing them
Myself wars on myself, for I myself—
That do my husband's will, yet fear to do it—
Grow dragonish to myself.

[*The* Women *have gathered about her.* NAISI *has stood looking at her, but* FERGUS *brings him to the chesstable.*

Fergus. We'll play at chess
Till the king comes. It is but natural
That she should fear him, for her house has been
The hole of the badger and the den of the fox.

Naisi. If I were childish and had faith in omens,
I'd rather not have lit on that old chessboard
At my home-coming.

Fergus. There 's a tale about it—
It has been lying there these many years—
Some wild old sorrowful tale.

Naisi. It is the board
Where Lughaidh Redstripe and that wife of his,
Who had a seamew's body half the year,
Played at the chess upon the night they died.

Fergus. I can remember now, a tale of treachery,
A broken promise and a journey's end—
But it were best forgot.

[DEIRDRE *has been standing with the* Women *about her. They have been helping her to put on her jewels and to put the pigment on her cheeks and arrange her hair. She has gradually grown attentive to what* FERGUS *is saying.*

Naisi. If the tale's true,
When it was plain that they had been betrayed,
They moved the men and waited for the end
As it were bedtime, and had so quiet minds
They hardly winked their eyes when the sword flashed.
Fergus. She never could have played so, being a woman,
If she had not the cold sea's blood in her.
Deirdre. I have heard the ever-living warn man-kind
By changing clouds and casual accidents,
Or what seem so.
Naisi. It would but ill become us,
Now that King Conchubar has pledged his word,
Should we be startled by a cloud or a shadow.
Deirdre. There 's none to welcome us.
Naisi. Being his guest,
Words that would wrong him can but wrong ourselves.
Deirdre. An empty house upon the journey's end!
Is that the way a king that means no mischief
Honours a guest?
Fergus. He is but making ready
A welcome in his house, arranging where
The moorhen and the mallard go, and where
The speckled heathcock on a golden dish.
Deirdre. Had he no messenger?
Naisi. Such words and fears
Wrong this old man who 's pledged his word to us.
You speak as women do that sit alone
Marking among the ashes with a stick
Till they are terrified.—You are a queen:
You should have too calm thought to start at shadows.
[*To* FERGUS.] Come, let us look if there 's a messenger
From Conchubar. We cannot see from this

Because we are blinded by the leaves and twigs,
But it may be the wood will thin again.
It is but kind that when the lips we love
Speak words that are unfitting for kings' ears
Our ears be deaf.

Fergus. But now I had to threaten
These wanderers because they would have weighed
Some crazy phantasy of their own brain
Or gossip of the road with Conchubar's word.
If I had thought so little of mankind
I never could have moved him to this pardon.
I have believed the best of every man,
And find that to believe it is enough
To make a bad man show him at his best,
Or even a good man swing his lantern higher.

[NAISI *and* FERGUS *go out. The last words are spoken as they go through the door. One can see them through part of what follows, either through door or window. They move about, talking or looking along the road towards* CONCHUBAR'S *house.*

First Mus. If anything lies heavy on your heart,
Speak freely of it, knowing it is certain
That you will never see my face again.

Deirdre. You've been in love?

First Mus. If you would speak of love,
Speak freely. There is nothing in the world
That has been friendly to us but the kisses
That were upon our lips, and when we are old
Their memory will be all the life we have.

Deirdre. There was a man that loved me. He was old;
I could not love him. Now I can but fear.
He has made promises, and brought me home;
But though I turn it over in my thoughts,

I cannot tell if they are sound and wholesome,
Or hackles on the hook.
First Mus. I have heard he loved you,
As some old miser loves the dragon-stone
He hides among the cobwebs near the roof.
Deirdre. You mean that when a man who has loved like that
Is after crossed, love drowns in its own flood,
And that love drowned and floating is but hate;
And that a king who hates, sleeps ill at night,
Till he has killed; and that, though the day laughs,
We shall be dead at cock-crow.
First Mus. You have not my thought.
When I lost one I loved distractedly,
I blamed my crafty rival and not him,
And fancied till my passion had run out,
That could I carry him away with me,
And tell him all my love, I'd keep him yet.
Deirdre. Ah! now I catch your meaning, that this king
Will murder Naisi, and keep me alive.
First Mus. 'Tis you that put that meaning upon words
Spoken at random.
Deirdre. Wanderers like you,
Who have their wit alone to keep their lives,
Speak nothing that is bitter to the ear
At random; if they hint at it at all
Their eyes and ears have gathered it so lately
That it is crying out in them for speech.
First Mus. We have little that is certain.
Deirdre. Certain or not,
Speak it out quickly, I beseech you to it;
I never have met any of your kind,

But that I gave them money, food and fire.
First Mus. There are strange, miracle-working, wicked stones,
Men tear out of the heart and the hot brain
Of Libyan dragons.
Deirdre. The hot Istain stone,
And the cold stone of Fanes, that have power
To stir even those at enmity to love.
First Mus. They have so great an influence, if but sewn
In the embroideries that curtain in
The bridal bed.
Deirdre. O Mover of the stars
That made this delicate house of ivory,
And made my soul its mistress, keep it safe!
First Mus. I have seen a bridal bed, so curtained in,
So decked for miracle in Conchubar's house,
And learned that a bride 's coming.
Deirdre. And I the bride?
Here is worse treachery than the seamew suffered,
For she but died and mixed into the dust
Of her dear comrade, but I am to live
And lie in the one bed with him I hate.
Where is Naisi? I was not alone like this
When Conchubar first chose me for his wife,
I cried in sleeping or waking and he came,
But now there is worse need.
Naisi. [*Entering with* FERGUS.] Why have you called?
I was but standing there, without the door.
Deirdre. I have heard terrible mysterious things,
Magical horrors and the spells of wizards.
Fergus. Why, that 's no wonder. You have been listening
To singers of the roads that gather up

The stories of the world.
Deirdre. But I have one
To make the stories of the world but nothing.
Naisi. Be silent if it is against the king
Whose guest you are.
Fergus. No, let her speak it out,
I know the High King's heart as it were my own,
And can refute a slander, but already
I have warned these women that it may be death.
Naisi. I will not weigh the gossip of the roads
With the king's word. I ask you pardon for her:
She has the heart of the wild birds that fear
The net of the fowler or the wicker cage.
Deirdre. Am I to see the fowler and the cage
And speak no word at all?
Naisi. You would have known,
Had they not bred you in that mountainous place,
That when we give a word and take a word
Sorrow is put away, past wrong forgotten.
Deirdre. Though death may come of it?
Naisi. Though death may come.
Fergus. To those that slander kings.
Deirdre. Then I will say
What it were best to carry to the grave.
Look at my face where the leaf raddled it
And at these rubies on my hair and breast.
It was for him, to stir him to desire,
I put on beauty; yes, for Conchubar.
Naisi. What frenzy put these words into your mouth?
Deirdre. No frenzy, for what need is there for frenzy
To change what shifts with every change of the wind,
Or else there is no truth in men's old sayings?
Was I not born a woman?

Naisi. You're mocking me.
Deirdre. And is there mockery in this face and eyes,
Or in this body, in these limbs that brought
So many mischiefs? Look at me and say
If that that shakes my limbs be mockery.
Naisi. What woman is there that a man can trust
But at the moment when he kisses her
At the first midnight?
Deirdre. Were it not most strange
That women should put evil in men's hearts
And lack it in themselves?
Naisi. Come, I command it:
We'll to the horses and take ship again
Fergus. Fool, she but seeks to rouse your jealousy
With crafty words.
Deirdre. Were we not born to wander?
These jewels have been reaped by the innocent sword
Upon a mountain, and a mountain bred me;
But who can tell what change can come to love
Among the valleys? I speak no falsehood now.
Away to windy summits, and there mock
The night-jar and the valley-keeping bird!
Fergus. Men blamed you that you stirred a quarrel up
That has brought death to many. I have poured
Water upon the fire, but if you fly
A second time, the house is in a blaze,
And all the screaming household will but blame
The savage heart of beauty for it all;
And Naisi, that has helped to tar the wisp,
Shall be a hunted outlaw all his days.
Deirdre. I will be blamed no more. There's but one way:
I'll spoil this beauty that brought misery

And houseless wandering on the man I loved.
These wanderers will show me how to do it;
To clip this hair to baldness, blacken my skin
With walnut juice, and tear my face with briars.
Oh, that the creatures of the woods had torn
My body with their claws!

Fergus. What, wilder yet!

Deirdre. [*To* NAISI.] Whatever were to happen to my face
I'd be myself, and there 's not any way
But this to bring all trouble to an end.

Naisi. What have you told to put such frenzy in her?

Fergus. Yes, speak it out.

Naisi. I give you my protection,
Are you afraid to speak? Does the king love her?
Will no one answer?

Deirdre. Tell out all the plot,
The plan, the network, all the treachery;
Tell of the bridal chamber and the bed,
The magical stones, the wizard's handiwork.

Naisi. Ah! now I understand why it is you fear
To waken death with words. Take care of Deirdre:
She must not fall alive into his hands,
Whatever the cost.

Deirdre. Where would you go to, Naisi?

Naisi. I go to drag the truth from Conchubar,
Before his people, in the face of his army,
And if it be as black as you have made it,
To kill him there.

Deirdre. You never would return;
I'll never look upon your face again.
Oh, keep him, Fergus; do not let him go,
But hold him from it. You are both wise and kind.

Naisi. When you were all but Conchubar's wife, I took you;
He tried to kill me, and he would have done it
If I had been so near as I am now.
And now that you are mine, he has planned to take you.
Should I be less than Conchubar, being a man?

[*Dark-faced* MESSENGER *comes into the house, unnoticed.*

Messenger. Supper is on the table, Conchubar
Is waiting for his guests.

Fergus. All's well, again!
All's well! all's well! You cried your doubts so loud
That I had almost doubted.

Naisi. I would have killed him,
And he the while but busy in his house
For the more welcome.

Deirdre. The message is not finished.

Fergus. Come quickly. Conchubar will laugh, that I—
Although I held out boldly in my speech—
That I, even I——

Deirdre. Wait, wait! He is not done.

Messenger. Deirdre and Fergus, son of Rogh, are summoned;
But not the traitor that bore off the queen.
It is enough that the king pardon her,
And call her to his table and his bed.

Naisi. So then, it 's treachery.

Fergus. I'll not believe it.

Naisi. Tell Conchubar to meet me in some place
Where none can come between us but our swords,
For I have found no truth on any tongue
That 's not of iron.

Messenger. I am Conchubar's man;
I take no message but he bids me do it. [*He goes.*

Naisi. I bid you. I will have you swear to take it.
[*He follows* MESSENGER *out.*
Fergus. Some enemy has paid him well for this.
I know King Conchubar's mind as it were my own;
I'll learn the truth from him.
[*He is about to follow* NAISI, *but* DEIRDRE *stops him.*
Deirdre. No, no, old man,
You thought the best, and the worst came of it;
We listened to the counsel of the wise,
And so turned fools. But ride and bring your friends.
Go, and go quickly. Conchubar has not seen me;
It may be that his passion is asleep,
And that we may escape.
Fergus. But I'll go first,
And follow up that Libyan heel, and send
Such words to Conchubar, that he may know
At how great peril he lays hands upon you.
[NAISI *enters.*]
Naisi. The Libyan, knowing that a servant's life
Is safe from hands like mine, but turned and mocked.
Fergus. I'll call my friends, and call the reaping-hooks,
And carry you in safety to the ships.
My name has still some power. I will protect,
Or, if that is impossible, revenge. [*Goes out by other door.*
Naisi. [*Who is calm, like a man who has passed beyond life.*] The crib has fallen and the birds are in it;
There is not one of the great oaks about us
But shades a hundred men.
Deirdre. Let 's out and die,
Or break away, if the chance favour us.
Naisi. They would but drag you from me, stained with blood.
Their barbarous weapons would but mar that beauty,

And I would have you die as a queen should—
In a death chamber. You are in my charge.
We will wait here, and when they come upon us,
I'll hold them from the doors, and when that 's over,
Give you a cleanly death with this grey edge.
Deirdre. I will stay here; but you go out and fight.
Our way of life has brought no friends to us,
And if we do not buy them leaving it,
We shall be ever friendless.
Naisi. What do they say?
That Lugaidh Redstripe and that wife of his
Sat at this chessboard, waiting for their end.
They knew that there was nothing that could save them,
And so played chess as they had any night
For years, and waited for the stroke of sword.
I never heard a death so out of reach
Of common hearts, a high and comely end.
What need have I, that gave up all for love,
To die like an old king out of a fable,
Fighting and passionate? What need is there
For all that ostentation at my setting?
I have loved truly and betrayed no man.
I need no lightning at the end, no beating
In a vain fury at the cage's door.
[*To* MUSICIANS.] Had you been here when that man and his queen
Played at so high a game, could you have found
An ancient poem for the praise of it?
It should have set out plainly that those two,
Because no man and woman have loved better,
Might sit on there contentedly, and weigh
The joy comes after. I have heard the seamew
Sat there, with all the colour in her cheeks,

As though she'd say: 'There 's nothing happening
But that a king and queen are playing chess.'

Deirdre. He 's in the right, though I have not been born
Of the cold, haughty waves, my veins being hot.
And though I have loved better than that queen,
I'll have as quiet fingers on the board.
Oh, singing women, set it down in a book
That love is all we need, even though it is
But the last drops we gather up like this;
And though the drops are all we have known of life,
For we have been most friendless—praise us for it
And praise the double sunset, for naught 's lacking,
But a good end to the long, cloudy day.

Naisi. Light torches there and drive the shadows out.
For day's grey end comes up.

[*A* MUSICIAN *lights a torch in the fire and then crosses before the chess-players, and slowly lights the torches in the sconces. The light is almost gone from the wood, but there is a clear evening light in the sky, increasing the sense of solitude and loneliness.*

Deirdre. Make no sad music.
What is it but a king and queen at chess?
They need a music that can mix itself
Into imagination, but not break
The steady thinking that the hard game needs.

[*During the chess, the* MUSICIANS *sing this song.*

Love is an immoderate thing
And can never be content,
Till it dip an ageing wing,
Where some laughing element

Leaps and Time's old lanthorn dims.
What 's the merit in love-play,
In the tumult of the limbs
That dies out before 'tis day,
Heart on heart, or mouth on mouth,
All that mingling of our breath,
When love longing is but drouth
For the things come after death?

[*During the last verses* DEIRDRE *rises from the board and kneels at* NAISI's *feet.*

Deirdre. I cannot go on playing like that woman
That had but the cold blood of the sea in her veins.
Naisi. It is your move. Take up your man again.
Deirdre. Do you remember that first night in the woods
We lay all night on leaves, and looking up,
When the first grey of the dawn awoke the birds,
Saw leaves above us? You thought that I still slept,
And bending down to kiss me on the eyes,
Found they were open. Bend and kiss me now,
For it may be the last before our death.
And when that 's over, we'll be different;
Imperishable things, a cloud or a fire.
And I know nothing but this body, nothing
But that old vehement, bewildering kiss.

[CONCHUBAR *comes to the door.*

Mus. Children, beware!
Naisi. [*Laughing.*] He has taken up my challenge;
Whether I am a ghost or living man
When day has broken, I'll forget the rest,
And say that there is kingly stuff in him.

[*Turns to fetch spear and shield, and then sees that* CONCHUBAR *has gone.*

First Mus. He came to spy upon you, not to fight.
Naisi. A prudent hunter, therefore, but no king.
He'd find if what has fallen in the pit
Were worth the hunting, but has come too near,
And I turn hunter. You're not man, but beast.
Go scurry in the bushes, now, beast, beast,
For now it 's topsy-turvey. I upon you.
[*He rushes out after* CONCHUBAR.
Deirdre. You have a knife there, thrust into your girdle.
I'd have you give it me.
Mus. No, but I dare not.
Deirdre. No, but you must.
Mus. If harm should come to you,
They'd know I gave it.
Deirdre. [*Snatching knife.*] There is no mark on this
To make it different from any other
Out of a common forge. [*Goes to the door and looks out.*
Mus. You have taken it,
I did not give it you; but there are times
When such a thing is all the friend one has.
Deirdre. The leaves hide all, and there 's no way to find
What path to follow. Why is there no sound?
[*She goes from door to window.*
Mus. Where would you go?
Deirdre. To strike a blow for Naisi,
If Conchubar call the Libyans to his aid.
But why is there no clash? They have met by this!
Mus. Listen. I am called wise. If Conchubar win,
You have a woman's wile that can do much,
Even with men in pride of victory.
He is in love and old. What were one knife
Among a hundred?

Deirdre. [*Going towards them.*] Women, if I die,
If Naisi die this night, how will you praise?
What words seek out? for that will stand to you;
For being but dead we shall have many friends.
All through your wanderings, the doors of kings
Shall be thrown wider open, the poor man's hearth
Heaped with new turf, because you are wearing this
[*Gives* MUSICIAN *a bracelet.*
To show that you have Deirdre's story right.

Mus. Have you not been paid servants in love's house
To sweep the ashes out and keep the doors?
And though you have suffered all for mere love's sake
You'd live your lives again.

Deirdre. Even this last hour.

[CONCHUBAR *enters with dark-faced* Men.]

Conchubar. One woman and two men; that is a quarrel
That knows no mending. Bring in the man she chose
Because of his beauty and the strength of his youth.

[*The dark-faced* Men *drag in* NAISI *entangled in a net.*

Naisi. I have been taken like a bird or a fish.

Conchubar. He cried 'Beast, beast!' and in a blind-beast rage
He ran at me and fell into the nets,
But we were careful for your sake, and took him
With all the comeliness that woke desire
Unbroken in him. I being old and lenient—
I would not hurt a hair upon his head.

Deirdre. What do you say? Have you forgiven him?

Naisi. He is but mocking us. What 's left to say
Now that the seven years' hunt is at an end?

Deirdre. He never doubted you until I made him,
And therefore all the blame for what he says
Should fall on me.

Conchubar. But his young blood is hot,
And if we're of one mind, he shall go free,
And I ask nothing for it, or, if something,
Nothing I could not take. There is no king
In the wide world that, being so greatly wronged,
Could copy me, and give all vengeance up.
Although her marriage-day had all but come,
You carried her away; but I'll show mercy.
Because you had the insolent strength of youth
You carried her away; but I've had time
To think it out through all these seven years.
I will show mercy.

Naisi. You have many words.

Conchubar. I will not make a bargain; I but ask
What is already mine.

[DEIRDRE *moves slowly towards* CONCHUBAR *while he is speaking, her eyes fixed upon him.*

You may go free
If Deirdre will but walk into my house
Before the people's eyes, that they may know
When I have put the crown upon her head
I have not taken her by force and guile.
The doors are open, and the floors are strewed,
And in the bridal chamber curtains sewn
With all enchantments that give happiness,
By races that are germane to the sun,
And nearest him, and have no blood in their veins—
For when they're wounded the wound drips with wine—
Nor speech but singing. At the bridal door
Two fair king's daughters carry in their hands
The crown and robe.

Deirdre. Oh, no! Not that, not that.
Ask any other thing but that one thing.

Leave me with Naisi. We will go away
Into some country at the ends of the earth.
We'll trouble you no more; and there is no one
That will not praise you if you pardon us.
'He is good, he is good,' they'll say to one another;
'There 's nobody like him, for he forgave
Deirdre and Naisi.'

Conchubar. Do you think that I
Shall let you go again, after seven years
Of longing and of planning here and there,
And trafficking with merchants for the stones
That make all sure, and watching my own face
That none might read it?

Deirdre. [*To* NAISI.] It 's better to go with him.
Why should you die when one can bear it all?
My life is over; it 's better to obey.
Why should you die? I will not live long, Naisi.
I'd not have you believe I'd long stay living;
Oh no, no, no! You will go far away.
You will forget me. Speak, speak, Naisi, speak,
And say that it is better that I go.
I will not ask it. Do not speak a word,
For I will take it all upon myself.
Conchubar, I will go.

Naisi. And do you think
That, were I given life at such a price,
I would not cast it from me? O, my eagle!
Why do you beat vain wings upon the rock
When hollow night 's above?

Deirdre. It 's better, Naisi.
It may be hard for you, but you'll forget.
For what am I, to be remembered always?
And there are other women. There was one,

The daughter of the King of Leodas;
I could not sleep because of her. Speak to him;
Tell it out plain, and make him understand.
And if it be he thinks I shall stay living,
Say that I will not.

Naisi. Would I had lost life
Among those Scottish kings that sought it of me,
Because you were my wife, or that the worst
Had taken you before this bargaining!
O eagle! If you were to do this thing,
And buy my life of Conchubar with your body,
Love's law being broken, I would stand alone
Upon the eternal summits, and call out,
And you could never come there, being banished.

Deirdre. [*Kneeling to* CONCHUBAR.] I would obey, but cannot. Pardon us.
I know that you are good. I have heard you praised
For giving gifts; and you will pardon us,
Although I cannot go into your house.
It was my fault. I only should be punished.

[*Unseen by* DEIRDRE, NAISI *is gagged.*

The very moment these eyes fell on him,
I told him; I held out my hands to him;
How could he refuse? At first he would not—
I am not lying—he remembered you.
What do I say? My hands?—No, no, my lips—
For I had pressed my lips upon his lips—
I swear it is not false—my breast to his;

[CONCHUBAR *motions;* NAISI *unseen by* DEIRDRE, *is taken behind the curtain.*

Until I woke the passion that 's in all,
And how could he resist? I had my beauty.
You may have need of him, a brave, strong man,

Who is not foolish at the council board,
Nor does he quarrel by the candle-light
And give hard blows to dogs. A cup of wine
Moves him to mirth, not madness. [*She stands up.*
What am I saying?
You may have need of him, for you have none
Who is so good a sword, or so well loved
Among the common people. You may need him,
And what king knows when the hour of need may come?
You dream that you have men enough. You laugh.
Yes; you are laughing to yourself. You say,
'I am Conchubar—I have no need of him.'
You will cry out for him some day and say,
'If Naisi were but living'——[*She misses* NAISI.] Where is he?
Where have you sent him? Where is the son of Usna?
Where is he, O, where is he?

[*She staggers over to the* MUSICIANS. *The* EXECUTIONER *has come out with sword on which there is blood;* CONCHUBAR *points to it. The* MUSICIANS *give a wail.*

Conchubar. The traitor who has carried off my wife
No longer lives. Come to my house now, Deirdre,
For he that called himself your husband's dead.

Deirdre. O, do not touch me. Let me go to him.
[*Pause.*
King Conchubar is right. My husband's dead.
A single woman is of no account,
Lacking array of servants, linen cupboards,
The bacon hanging—and King Conchubar's house
All ready, too—I'll to King Conchubar's house.
It is but wisdom to do willingly
What has to be.

Conchubar. But why are you so calm?
I thought that you would curse me and cry out,
And fall upon the ground and tear your hair.
Deirdre. [*Laughing.*] You know too much of women
to think so;
Though, if I were less worthy of desire,
I would pretend as much; but, being myself,
It is enough that you were master here.
Although we are so delicately made,
There 's something brutal in us, and we are won
By those who can shed blood. It was some woman
That taught you how to woo: but do not touch me:
I shall do all you bid me, but not yet
Because I have to do what 's customary.
We lay the dead out, folding up the hands,
Closing the eyes, and stretching out the feet,
And push a pillow underneath the head,
Till all 's in order; and all this I'll do
For Naisi, son of Usna.
Conchubar. It is not fitting.
You are not now a wanderer, but a queen,
And there are plenty that can do these things.
Deirdre. [*Motioning* CONCHUBAR *away.*] No, no. Not
yet. I cannot be your queen,
Till the past 's finished, and its debts are paid.
When a man dies, and there are debts unpaid,
He wanders by the debtor's bed and cries,
'There 's so much owing'.
Conchubar. You are deceiving me.
You long to look upon his face again.
Why should I give you now to a dead man
That took you from a living?
[*He makes a step towards her.*

Deirdre. In good time.
You'll stir me to more passion than he could,
And yet, if you are wise, you'll grant me this:
That I go look upon him that was once
So strong and comely and held his head so high
That women envied me. For I will see him
All blood-bedabbled and his beauty gone.
It 's better, when you're beside me in your strength,
That the mind's eye should call up the soiled body,
And not the shape I loved. Look at him, women.
He heard me pleading to be given up,
Although my lover was still living, and yet
He doubts my purpose. I will have you tell him
How changeable all women are. How soon
Even the best of lovers is forgot,
When his day 's finished.
Conchubar. No; but I will trust
The strength that you have praised, and not your purpose.
Deirdre. [*Almost with a caress.*] It is so small a gift
and you will grant it
Because it is the first that I have asked.
He has refused. There is no sap in him;
Nothing but empty veins. I thought as much.
He has refused me the first thing I have asked—
Me, me, his wife. I understand him now;
I know the sort of life I'll have with him;
But he must drag me to his house by force.
If he refuse [*she laughs*], he shall be mocked of all.
They'll say to one another, 'Look at him
That is so jealous that he lured a man
From over sea, and murdered him, and yet
He trembled at the thought of a dead face!'
[*She has her hand upon curtain.*

Conchubar. How do I know that you have not some knife,
And go to die upon his body?
Deirdre. Have me searched,
If you would make so little of your queen.
It may be that I have a knife hid here
Under my dress. Bid one of these dark slaves
To search me for it. [*Pause.*
Conchubar. Go to your farewells, queen.
Deirdre. Now strike the wire, and sing to it a while,
Knowing that all is happy, and that you know
Within what bride-bed I shall lie this night,
And by what man, and lie close up to him,
For the bed 's narrow, and there outsleep the cock-crow.
[*She goes behind the curtain.*
First Mus. They are gone, they are gone. The proud may lie by the proud.
Sec. Mus. Though we were bidden to sing, cry nothing loud.
First Mus. They are gone, they are gone.
Sec. Mus. Whispering were enough.
First Mus. Into the secret wilderness of their love.
Sec. Mus. A high, grey cairn. What more is to be said?
First Mus. Eagles have gone into their cloudy bed.
[*Shouting outside.* FERGUS *enters. Many men with scythes and sickles and torches gather about the doors. The house is lit with the glare of their torches.*
Fergus. Where 's Naisi, son of Usna, and his queen?
I and a thousand reaping-hooks and scythes
Demand him of you.
Conchubar. You have come too late.
I have accomplished all. Deirdre is mine;
She is my queen, and no man now can rob me.

I had to climb the topmost bough, and pull
This apple among the winds. Open the curtain,
That Fergus learn my triumph from her lips.

[*The curtain is drawn back. The* MUSICIANS *begin to keen with low voices.*

No, no; I'll not believe it. She is not dead—
She cannot have escaped a second time!

Fergus. King, she is dead; but lay no hand upon her.
What 's this but empty cage and tangled wire,
Now the bird 's gone? but I'll not have you touch it.

Conchubar. You are all traitors, all against me—all.
And she has deceived me for a second time.
And every common man can keep his wife,
But not the King.

[*Loud shouting outside:* 'Death to Conchubar!' 'Where is Naisi? etc. *The dark-skinned* Men *gather round* CONCHUBAR *and draw their swords; but he motions them away.*

I have no need of weapons,
There 's not a traitor that dare stop my way.
Howl, if you will; but I, being king, did right
In choosing her most fitting to be queen,
And letting no boy lover take the sway.

THE GREEN HELMET

AN HEROIC FARCE

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

LAEGAIRE
CONALL
CUCHULAIN
RED MAN, *A Spirit*
EMER
LAEGAIRE'S WIFE
LAEG, *Cuchulain's chariot-driver*
Horse Boys and Scullions
Black Men, etc.

THE GREEN HELMET:

AN HEROIC FARCE.

SCENE: *A house made of logs. There are two windows at the back and a door which cuts off one of the corners of the room. Through the door one can see low rocks which make the ground outside higher than it is within, and beyond the rocks a misty moon-lit sea. Through the windows one can see nothing but the sea. There is a great chair at the opposite side to the door, and in front of it a table with cups and a flagon of ale. Here and there are stools.*

At the Abbey Theatre the house is orange red and the chairs and tables and flagons black, with a slight purple tinge which is not clearly distiguishable from the black. The rocks are black with a few green touches. The sea is green and luminous, and all the characters except the RED MAN *and the* Black Men *are dressed in various shades of green, one or two with touches of purple which look nearly black. The* Black Men *all wear dark purple and have eared caps, and at the end their eyes should look green from the reflected light of the sea. The* RED MAN *is altogether in red. He is very tall, and his height increased by horns on the Green Helmet. The effect is intentionally violent and startling.*

Laegaire. What is that? I had thought that I saw, though but in
the wink of an eye,
A cat-headed man out of Connaught go pacing and spitting by;
But that could not be.

Conall. You have dreamed it—there's nothing out there
I killed them all before daybreak—I hoked them out of their lair;
I cut off a hundred heads with a single stroke of my sword,
And then I danced on their graves and carried away their hoard.

Laegaire. Does anything stir on the sea?
Con. Not even a fish or a gull:
I can see for a mile or two, now that the moon 's at the full.
[*A distant shout.*
Laegaire. Ah—there—there is someone who calls us.
Con. But from the landward side,
And we have nothing to fear that has not come up from the tide;
The rocks and the bushes cover whoever made that noise,
But the land will do us no harm.
Laegaire. It was like Cuchulain's voice.
Con. But that 's an impossible thing.
Laegaire. An impossible thing indeed.
Con. For he will never come home, he has all that he could need
In that high windy Scotland—good luck in all that he does.
Here neighbour wars on neighbour and why there is no man knows,
And if a man is lucky all wish his luck away,
And take his good name from him between a day and a day.
Laegaire. I would he'd come for all that, and make his young wife know
That though she may be his wife, she has no right to go
Before your wife and my wife, as she would have gone last night
Had they not caught at her dress, and pulled her as was right;
And she makes light of us though our wives do all that they can.
She spreads her tail like a peacock and praises none but her man.
Con. A man in a long green cloak that covers him up to the chin
Comes down through the rocks and hazels.
Laegaire. Cry out that he cannot come in.
Con. He must look for his dinner elsewhere, for no one alive shall stop
Where a shame must alight on us two before the dawn is up.
Laegaire. No man on the ridge of the world must ever know that but us two.
Con. [*Outside door.*] Go away, go away, go away.
Young Man. [*Outside door.*] I will go when the night is through
And I have eaten and slept and drunk to my heart's delight.
Con. A law has been made that none shall sleep in this house to-night.

Young Man. Who made that law?
Con. We made it, and who has so good a right?
Who else has to keep the house from the Shape-Changers till day?
Young Man. Then I will unmake the law, so get you out of the way.
[*He pushes past* CONALL *and goes into house.*
Con. I thought that no living man could have pushed me from the door
Nor could any living man do it but for the dip in the floor;
And had I been rightly ready there 's no man living could do it,
Dip or no dip.
Laegaire. Go out—if you have your wits, go out,
A stone's throw further on you will find a big house where
Our wives will give you supper, and you'll sleep sounder there,
For it 's a luckier house.
Young Man. I'll eat and sleep where I will.
Laegaire. Go out or I will make you.
Young Man. [*Forcing up* LAEGAIRE's *arm, passing him and putting his shield on the wall over the chair.*] Not till I have drunk my fill,
But may some dog defend me for a cat of wonder 's up.
Laegaire and Conall are here, the flagon full to the top,
And the cups—
Laegaire. It is Cuchulain.
Cuchulain. The cups are dry as a bone.
[*He sits on chair and drinks.*
Con. Go into Scotland again, or where you will, but begone
From this unlucky country that was made when the devil spat.
Cuch. If I lived here a hundred years, could a worse thing come than that
Laegaire and Conall should know me and bid me begone to my face?
Con. We bid you begone from a house that has fallen on shame and disgrace.
Cuch. I am losing patience, Conall— I find you stuffed with pride,
The flagon full to the brim, the front door standing wide;
You'd put me off with words, but the whole thing 's plain enough,
You are waiting for some message to bring you to war or love
In that old secret country beyond the wool-white waves,
Or it may be down beneath them in foam-bewildered caves

Where nine forsaken sea queens fling shuttles to and fro;
But beyond them, or beneath them, whether you will or no,
I am going too.

Laegaire. Better tell it all out to the end;
He was born to luck in the cradle, his good luck may amend
The bad luck we were born to.

Con. I'll lay the whole thing bare.
You saw the luck that he had when he pushed in past me there.
Does anything stir on the sea?

Laegaire. Not even a fish or a gull.

Con. You were gone but a little while. We were there and the ale-cup full.
We were half drunk and merry, and midnight on the stroke
When a wide, high man came in with a red foxy cloak,
With half-shut foxy eyes and a great laughing mouth,
And he said when we bid him drink, that he had so great a drouth
He could drink the sea.

Cuch. I thought he had come for one of you
Out of some Connaught rath, and would lap up milk and mew;
But if he so loved water I have the tale awry.

Con. You would not be so merry if he were standing by,
For when we had sung or danced as he were our next of kin
He promised to show us a game, the best that ever had been;
And when we had asked what game, he answered, 'Why, whip off my head!
Then one of you two stoop down, and I'll whip off his,' he said.
'A head for a head,' he said, 'that is the game that I play.'

Cuch. How could he whip off a head when his own had been whipped away?

Con. We told him it over and over, and that ale had fuddled his wit,
But he stood and laughed at us there, as though his sides would split
Till I could stand it no longer, and whipped off his head at a blow,
Being mad that he did not answer, and more at his laughing so,
And there on the ground where it fell it went on laughing at me.

Laegaire. Till he took it up in his hands—

Con. And splashed himself into the sea.

Cuch. I have imagined as good when I've been as deep in the cup.
Laegaire. You never did.
Cuch. And believed it.
Con. Cuchulain, when will you stop
Boasting of your great deeds, and weighing yourself with us two,
And crying out to the world whatever we say or do,
That you've said or done a better?—Nor is it a drunkard's tale,
Though we said to ourselves at first that it all came out of the ale,
And thinking that if we told it we should be a laughing stock
Swore we should keep it secret.
Laegaire. But twelve months upon the clock.
Con. A twelve month from the first time.
Laegaire. And the jug full up to the brim:
For we had been put from our drinking by the very thought of him.
Con. We stood as we're standing now.
Laegaire. The horns were as empty.
Con. When
He ran up out of the sea with his head on his shoulders again.
Cuch. Why, this is a tale worth telling.
Con. And he called for his debt and his right,
And said that the land was disgraced because of us two from that night
If we did not pay him his debt.
Laegaire. What is there to be said
When a man with a right to get it has come to ask for your head?
Con. If you had been sitting there you had been silent like us.
Laegaire. He said that in twelve months more he would come again to this house
And ask his debt again. Twelve months are up to-day.
Con. He would have followed after if we had run away.
Laegaire. Will he tell every mother's son that we have broken our word?
Cuch. Whether he does or does not we'll drive him out with the sword,
And take his life in the bargain if he but dare to scoff.
Con. How can you fight with a head that laughs when you've whipped it off?

Laegaire. Or a man that can pick it up and carry it out in his hand?
Con. He is coming now, there 's a splash and a rumble along the strand
As when he came last.
Cuch. Come, and put all your backs to the door.
[*A tall, red-headed, red-cloaked man stands upon the threshold against the misty green of the sea; the ground, higher without than within the house, makes him seem taller even than he is. He leans upon a great two-handed sword.*
Laegaire. It is too late to shut it, for there he stands once more
And laughs like the sea.
Cuch. Old herring—You whip off heads! Why, then
Whip off your own, for it seems you can clap it on again.
Or else go down in the sea, go down in the sea, I say,
Find that old juggler Manannan and whip his head away;
Or the Red Man of the Boyne for they are of your own sort,
Or if the waves have vexed you and you would find a sport
Of a more Irish fashion, go fight without a rest
A caterwauling phantom among the winds of the west.
But what are you waiting for? into the water I say!
If there 's no sword can harm you, I've an older trick to play,
An old five-fingered trick to tumble you out of the place;
I am Sualtim's son Cuchulain—what, do you laugh in my face?
Red Man. So you too think me in earnest in wagering poll for poll!
A drinking joke and a gibe and a juggler's feat, that is all,
To make the time go quickly—for I am the drinker's friend,
The kindest of all Shape-Changers from here to the world's end,
The best of all tipsy companions. And now I bring you a gift:
I will lay it there on the ground for the best of you all to lift,
[*He lays his Helmet on the ground.*
And wear upon his own head, and choose for yourselves the best.
O! Laegaire and Conall are brave, but they were afraid of my jest.
Well, maybe I jest too grimly when the ale is in the cup.
There, I'm forgiven now—
[*Then in a more solemn voice as he goes out.*] Let the bravest take it up.
[CONALL *takes up Helmet and gazes at it with delight.*

LAEGAIRE. [*Singing, with a swaggering stride.*]

Laegaire is best;
Between water and hill,
He fought in the west
With cat heads, until
At the break of day
All fell by his sword,
And he carried away
Their hidden hoard. [*He seizes the Helmet.*

Con. Give it me, for what did you find in the bag
But the straw and the broken delf and the bits of dirty rag
You'd taken for good money?

Cuch. No, no, but give it me. [*He takes Helmet.*

Con. The Helmet's mine or Laegaire's—you're the youngest of us three.

Cuch. [*Filling Helmet with ale.*] I did not take it to keep it—the Red Man gave it for one,
But I shall give it to all—to all of us three or to none;
That is as you look upon it—we will pass it to and fro,
And time and time about, drink out of it and so
Stroke into peace this cat that has come to take our lives.
Now it is purring again, and now I drink to your wives,
And I drink to Emer, my wife. [*A great noise without and shouting.*
Why what in God's name is that noise?

Con. What else but the charioteers and the kitchen and stable boys
Shouting against each other, and the worst of all is your own
That chariot-driver, Laeg, and they'll keep it up till the dawn,
And there's not a man in the house that will close his eyes to-night,
Or be able to keep them from it, or know what set them to fight.
[*A noise of horns without.*
There, do you hear them now? such hatred has each for each
They have taken the hunting horns to drown one other's speech
For fear the truth may prevail.—Here's your good health and long life
And, though she be quarrelsome, good health to Emer, your wife.

[*The* Charioteers, Stable Boys *and* Kitchen Boys *come running in. They carry great horns, ladles and the like.*

Laeg. I am Laeg, Cuchulain's driver, and my master 's cock of the yard.

Another. Conall would scatter his feathers. [*Confused murmurs.*

Laegaire. [*To* CUCHULAIN.] No use, they won't hear a word.

Con. They'll keep it up till the dawn.

Another. It is Laegaire that is the best,
For he fought with cats in Connaught while Conall took his rest
And drained his ale pot.

Another. Laegaire—what does a man of his sort
Care for the like of us? He did it for his own sport.

Another. It was all mere luck at the best.

Another. But Conall, I say—

Another. Let me speak.

Laeg. You'd be dumb if the cock of the yard would but open his beak.

Another. Before your cock was born, my master was in the fight.

Laeg. Go home and praise your grand-dad. They took to the horns for spite,
For I said that no cock of your sort had been born since the fight began.

Another. Conall has got it, the best man has got it, and I am his man.

Cuch. Who was it started this quarrel?

A Stable Boy. It was Laeg.

Another. It was Laeg done it all.

Laeg. A high, wide, foxy man came where we sat in the hall,
Getting our supper ready, with a great voice like the wind,
And cried that there was a helmet, or something of the kind,
That was for the foremost man upon the ridge of the earth.
So I cried your name through the hall

[*The others cry out and blow horns, partly drowning the rest of his speech.*

but they denied its worth,
Preferring Laegaire or Conall, and they cried to drown my voice;
But I have so strong a throat that I drowned all their noise
Till they took to the hunting horns and blew them into my face,
And as neither side would give in—we would settle it in this place.
Let the Helmet be taken from Conall.

A Stable Boy. No, Conall is the best man here.

Another. Give it to Laegaire that made the murderous cats pay dear.

Cuch. It has been given to none: that our rivalry might cease,
We have turned that murderous cat into a cup of peace,
I drank the first; and then Conall; give it to Laegaire now
[CONALL *gives Helmet to* LAEGAIRE.
That it may purr in his hand and all of our servants know
That since the ale went in, its claws went out of sight.
A Servant. That's well—I will stop my shouting.
Another. Cuchulain is in the right;
I am tired of this big horn that has made me hoarse as a rook.
Laeg. Cuchulain, you drank the first.
Another. By drinking the first he took
The whole of the honours himself.
Laeg. Cuchulain, you drank the first.
Another. If Laegaire drink from it now he claims to be last and worst.
Another. Cuchulain and Conall have drunk.
Another. He is lost if he taste a drop.
Laegaire. [*Laying Helmet on table.*] Did you claim to be better than us by drinking first from the cup?
Cuch. [*His words are partly drowned by the murmurs of the crowd though he speaks very loud.*] That juggler from the sea, that old red herring it is
Who has set us all by the ears—he brought the Helmet for this,
And because we would not quarrel he ran elsewhere to shout
That Conall and Laegaire wronged me, till all had fallen out.
[*The murmur grows less so that his words are heard.*
Who knows where he is now or who he is spurring to fight?
So get you gone, and whatever may cry aloud in the night,
Or show itself in the air, be silent until morn.
A Servant. Cuchulain is in the right—I am tired of this big horn.
Cuch. Go!
[*The* Servants *turn towards the door but stop on hearing the voices of* Women *outside.*
Laegaire's Wife. [*Without.*] Mine is the better to look at.
Conall's Wife. [*Without.*] But mine is better born.
Emer. [*Without.*] My man is the pithier man.
Cuch. Old hurricane, well done!

You've set our wives to the game that they may egg us on;
We are to kill each other that you may sport with us.
Ah, now, they've begun to wrestle as to who'll be first at the house.

[*The* Women *come to the door struggling.*

Emer. No, I have the right of place for I married the better man.

Conall's Wife. [*Pulling* EMER *back.*] My nails in your neck and shoulder.

Laegaire's Wife. And go before me if you can.
My husband fought in the West.

Conall's Wife. [*Kneeling in the door so as to keep the others out who pull at her.*] But what did he fight with there
But sidelong and spitting and helpless shadows of the dim air?
And what did he carry away but straw and broken delf?

Laegaire's Wife. Your own man made up that tale trembling alone by himself,
Drowning his terror.

Emer. [*Forcing herself in front.*] I am Emer, it is I go first through the door.
No one shall walk before me, or praise any man before
My man has been praised.

Cuch. [*Spreading his arms across the door so as to close it.*] Come, put an end to their quarrelling:
One is as fair as the other, and each one the wife of a king.
Break down the painted boards between the sill and the floor
That they come in together, each one at her own door.

[LAEGAIRE *and* CONALL *begin to break out the bottoms of the windows, then their wives go to the windows, each to the window where her husband is.* EMER *stands at the door and sings while the boards are being broken out.*

EMER.

Nothing that he has done;
His mind that is fire,
His body that is sun,
Have set my head higher

Than all the world's wives.
Himself on the wind
Is the gift that he gives,
Therefore women kind,
When their eyes have met mine,
Grow cold and grow hot
Troubled as with wine
By a secret thought,
Preyed upon, fed upon
By jealousy and desire,
For I am moon to that sun,
I am steel to that fire.

[*The windows are now broken down to floor.* CUCHULAIN *takes his spear from the door, and the three* Women *come in at the same moment.*

Emer. Cuchulain, put off this sloth and awake:
I will sing till I've stiffened your lip against every knave that would take
A share of your honour.

Laegaire's Wife. You lie, for your man would take from my man.

Conall's Wife. [*To* LAEGAIRE'S WIFE.] You say that, you double-face, and your own husband began.

Cuch. [*Taking up Helmet from table.*] Town land may rail at town land till all have gone to wrack,
The very straws may wrangle till they've thrown down the stack;
The very door-posts bicker till they've pulled in the door,
The very ale-jars jostle till the ale is on the floor,
But this shall help no further. [*He throws Helmet into the sea.*

Laegaire's Wife. It was not for your head,
And so you would let none wear it but fling it away instead.

Conall's Wife. But you shall answer for it, for you've robbed my man by this.

Con. You have robbed us both, Cuchulain.

Laegaire. The greatest wrong there is
On the wide ridge of the world has been done to us two this day.

Emer. [*Drawing her dagger.*] Who is for Cuchulain?

Cuch. Silence.

Emer. Who is for Cuchulain, I say?

[*She sings the same words as before, flourishing her dagger about. While she is singing,* CONALL'S WIFE *and* LAEGAIRE'S WIFE *draw their daggers and run at her, but* CUCHULAIN *forces them back.* LAEGAIRE *and* CONALL *draw their swords to strike* CUCHULAIN.

Laegaire's Wife. [*Crying out so as to be heard through* EMER'S *singing.*] Deafen her singing with horns!

Conall's Wife. Cry aloud! blow horns! make a noise!

Laegaire's Wife. Blow horns, clap hands, or shout, so that you smother her voice!

[*The* Horse Boys *and* Scullions *blow their horns or fight among themselves. There is a deafening noise and a confused fight. Suddenly three black hands come through the windows and put out the torches. It is now pitch dark, but for a faint light outside the house which merely shows that there are moving forms, but not who or what they are, and in the darkness one can hear low terrified voices.*

A Voice. Coal-black, and headed like cats, they came up over the strand.

Another Voice. And I saw one stretch to a torch and cover it with his hand.

Another Voice. Another sooty fellow has plucked the moon from the air.

[*A light gradually comes into the house from the sea, on which the moon begins to show once more. There is no light within the house, and the great beams of the walls are dark and full of shadows, and the persons of the play dark too against the light. The* RED MAN *is seen standing in the midst of the house. The black cat-headed* Men *crouch and stand about the door. One carries the Helmet, one the great sword.*

Red Man. I demand the debt that 's owing. Let some man kneel down there
That I may cut his head off, or all shall go to wrack.

Cuch. He played and paid with his head and it's right that we pay him back,
And give him more than he gave, for he comes in here as a guest:

So I will give him my head. [EMER *begins to keen.*
Little wife, little wife, be at rest.
Alive I have been far off in all lands under sun,
And been no faithful man; but when my story is done
My fame shall spring up and laugh, and set you high above all.
Emer. [*Putting her arms about him.*] It is you, not your fame that I love.
Cuch. [*Tries to put her from him.*] You are young, you are wise, you can call
Some kinder and comelier man that will sit at home in the house.
Emer. Live and be faithless still.
Cuch. [*Throwing her from him.*] Would you stay the great barnacle-goose
When its eyes are turned to the sea and its beak to the salt of the air?
Emer. [*Lifting her dagger to stab herself.*] I, too, on the grey wing's path.
Cuch. [*Seizing dagger.*] Do you dare, do you dare, do you dare?
Bear children and sweep the house.
[*Forcing his way through the servants who gather round.*
Wail, but keep from the road.
[*He kneels before* RED MAN. *There is a pause.*
Quick to your work, old Radish, you will fade when the cocks have crowed.
[*A black cat-headed* Man *holds out the Helmet. The* RED MAN *takes it.*
Red Man. I have not come for your hurt, I'm the Rector of this land,
And with my spitting cat-heads, my frenzied moon-bred band,
Age after age I sift it, and choose for its champion-ship
The man who hits my fancy. [*He places the Helmet on* CUCHULAIN'S *head.*
And I choose the laughing lip
That shall not turn from laughing whatever rise or fall,
The heart that grows no bitterer although betrayed by all;
The hand that loves to scatter; the life like a gambler's throw;
And these things I make prosper, till a day come that I know,
When heart and mind shall darken that the weak may end the strong,
And the long-remembering harpers have matter for their song.

THE END.

ON BAILE'S STRAND

To William Fay

Because of the beautiful phantasy of his playing in the character of the Fool.

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

A Fool
A Blind Man
Cuchulain, *King of Muirthemne*
Conchubar, *High King of Uladh*
A Young Man, *Son of Cuchulain*
Kings and Singing Women

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

A great hall at Dundealgan, not 'Cuchulain's great ancient house' but an assembly house nearer to the sea. A big door at the back, and through the door misty light as of sea mist. There are many chairs and one long bench. One of these chairs, which is towards the front of the stage, is bigger than the others. Somewhere at the back there is a table with flagons of ale upon it and drinking-horns. There is a small door at one side of the hall. A FOOL *and* BLIND MAN, *both ragged, come in through the door at the back. The* BLIND MAN *leans upon a staff.*

Fool. What a clever man you are though you are blind! There 's nobody with two eyes in his head that is as clever as you are. Who but you could have thought that the henwife sleeps every day a little at noon? I would never be able to steal anything if you didn't tell me where to look for it. And what a good cook you are! You take the fowl out of my hands after I have stolen it and plucked it, and you put it into the big pot at the fire there, and I can go out and run races with the witches at the edge of the waves and get an appetite, and when I've got it, there 's the hen waiting inside for me, done to the turn.

Blind Man. [*Who is feeling about with his stick.*] Done to the turn.

Fool. [*Putting his arm round* BLIND MAN'S *neck.*] Come now, I'll have a leg and you'll have a leg, and we'll draw lots for the wish-bone, I'll be praising you, I'll be praising you, while we're eating it, for your good plans and for your good cooking. There 's nobody in the world like you, Blind Man. Come, come. Wait a minute. I shouldn't have closed the door. There are some that look for me, and I wouldn't like them not to find me. Don't tell it to anybody, Blind Man. There are some that follow me. Boann herself out of the river and Fand out of the deep sea. Witches they are, and they come by in the wind, and they cry, 'Give a kiss, Fool, give a kiss,' that 's what they cry. That 's wide enough. All the witches can come in now. I wouldn't have them beat at the door and say: 'Where is the Fool? Why has he put a lock on the door?' Maybe they'll hear the bubbling of the pot and come in and sit on the ground. But we won't give them any of the fowl. Let them go back to the sea, let them go back to the sea.

Blind Man. [*Feeling legs of big chair with his hands.*] Ah! [*Then, in a louder voice as he feels the back of it.*] Ah—ah—

Fool. Why do you say 'Ah-ah'?

Blind Man. I know the big chair. It is to-day the High King Conchubar is coming. They have brought out his chair. He is going to be Cuchulain's master in earnest from this day out. It is that he 's coming for.

Fool. He must be a great man to be Cuchulain's master.

Blind Man. So he is. He is a great man. He is over all the rest of the kings of Ireland.

Fool. Cuchulain's master! I thought Cuchulain could do anything he liked.

Blind Man. So he did, so he did. But he ran too wild, and Conchubar is coming to-day to put an oath upon him that will stop his rambling and make him as biddable as a house-dog and keep him always at his hand. He will sit in this chair and put the oath upon him.

Fool. How will he do that?

Blind Man. You have no wits to understand such things. [*The* BLIND MAN *has got into the chair.*] He will sit up in this chair and he'll say: 'Take the oath, Cuchulain. I bid you take the oath. Do as I tell you. What are your wits compared with mine, and what are your riches compared with mine? And what sons have you to pay your debts and to put a stone over you when you die? Take the oath, I tell you. Take a strong oath.'

Fool. [*Crumpling himself up and whining.*] I will not. I'll take no oath. I want my dinner.

Blind Man. Hush, hush! It is not done yet.

Fool. You said it was done to a turn.

Blind Man. Did I, now? Well, it might be done, and not done. The wings might be white, but the legs might be red. The flesh might stick hard to the bones and not come away in the teeth. But, believe me, Fool, it will be well done before you put your teeth in it.

Fool. My teeth are growing long with the hunger.

Blind Man. I'll tell you a story—the kings have story-tellers while they are waiting for their dinner—I will tell you a story with a fight in it, a story with a champion in it, and a ship and a queen's son that has his mind set on killing somebody that you and I know.

Fool. Who is that? Who is he coming to kill?

Blind Man. Wait, now, till you hear. When you were stealing the fowl, I was lying in a hole in the sand,

and I heard three men coming with a shuffling sort of noise. They were wounded and groaning.

Fool. Go on. Tell me about the fight.

Blind Man. There had been a fight, a great fight, a tremendous great fight. A young man had landed on the shore, the guardians of the shore had asked his name, and he had refused to tell it, and he had killed one, and others had run away.

Fool. That 's enough. Come on now to the fowl. I wish it was bigger. I wish it was as big as a goose.

Blind Man. Hush! I haven't told you all. I know who that young man is. I heard the men who were running away say he had red hair, that he had come from Aoife's country, that he was coming to kill Cuchulain.

Fool. Nobody can do that.

[*To a tune.*]

Cuchulain has killed kings,
Kings and sons of kings,
Dragons out of the water,
And witches out of the air,
Banachas and Bonachas and people of the woods.

Blind Man. Hush! hush!

Fool. [*Still singing.*]

Witches that steal the milk,
Fomor that steal the children,
Hags that have heads like hares,
Hares that have claws like witches,
All riding a cock-horse

[*Spoken.*]

Out of the very bottom of the bitter black north.

Blind Man. Hush, I say!

Fool. Does Cuchulain know that he is coming to kill him?

Blind Man. How would he know that with his head in the clouds? He doesn't care for common fighting. Why would he put himself out, and nobody in it but that young man? Now if it were a white fawn that might turn into a queen before morning—

Fool. Come to the fowl. I wish it was as big as a pig; a fowl with goose grease and pig's crackling.

Blind Man. No hurry, no hurry. I know whose son it is. I wouldn't tell anybody else, but I will tell you,—a secret is better to you than your dinner. You like being told secrets.

Fool. Tell me the secret.

Blind Man. That young man is Aoife's son. I am sure it is Aoife's son, it flows in upon me that it is Aoife's son. You have often heard me talking of Aoife, the great woman-fighter Cuchulain got the mastery over in the north?

Fool. I know, I know. She is one of those cross queens that live in hungry Scotland.

Blind Man. I am sure it is her son. I was in Aoife's country for a long time.

Fool. That was before you were blinded for putting a curse upon the wind.

Blind Man. There was a boy in her house that had her own red colour on him and everybody said he was to be brought up to kill Cuchulain, that she hated Cuchulain. She used to put a helmet on a pillar-stone and call it Cuchulain and set him casting at it. There is a step outside—Cuchulain's step.

[CUCHULAIN *passes by in the mist outside the big door.*

Fool. Where is Cuchulain going?

Blind Man. He is going to meet Conchubar that has bidden him to take the oath.

Fool. Ah, an oath, Blind Man. How can I remember so many things at once? Who is going to take an oath?

Blind Man. Cuchulain is going to take an oath to Conchubar who is High King.

Fool. What a mix-up you make of everything, Blind Man! You were telling me one story, and now you are telling me another story . . . How can I get the hang of it at the end if you mix everything at the beginning? Wait till I settle it out. There now, there 's Cuchulain [*he points to one foot*], and there is the young man [*he points to the other foot*] that is coming to kill him, and Cuchulain doesn't know. But where 's Conchubar? [*Takes bag from side.*] That 's Conchubar with all his riches — Cuchulain, young man, Conchubar. — And where 's Aoife? [*Throws up cap.*] There is Aoife, high up on the mountains in high hungry Scotland. Maybe it is not true after all. Maybe it was your own making up. It's many a time you cheated me before with your lies. Come to the cooking-pot, my stomach is pinched and rusty. Would you have it to be creaking like a gate?

Blind Man. I tell you it's true. And more than that is true. If you listen to what I say, you'll forget your stomach.

Fool. I won't.

Blind Man. Listen. I know who the young man's father is, but I won't say. I would be afraid to say. Ah, Fool, you would forget everything if you could know who the young man's father is.

Fool. Who is it? Tell me now quick, or I'll shake you. Come, out with it, or I'll shake you.

[*A murmur of voices in the distance.*

Blind Man. Wait, wait. There 's somebody coming . . . It is Cuchulain is coming. He 's coming back with the High King. Go and ask Cuchulain. He'll tell you. It 's little you'll care about the cooking-pot when you have asked Cuchulain that . . .

[BLIND MAN *goes out by side door.*

Fool. I'll ask him. Cuchulain will know. He was in Aoife's country. [*Goes up stage.*] I'll ask him. [*Turns and goes down stage.*] But, no, I won't ask him, I would be afraid. [*Going up again.*] Yes, I will ask him. What harm in asking? The Blind Man said I was to ask him. [*Going down.*] No, no. I'll not ask him. He might kill me. I have but killed hens and geese and pigs. He has killed kings. [*Goes up again almost to big door.*] Who says I'm afraid? I'm not afraid. I'm no coward. I'll ask him. No, no, Cuchulain, I'm not going to ask you.

He has killed kings,
Kings and the sons of kings,
Dragons out of the water,
And witches out of the air,
Banachas and Bonachas and people of the woods.

[FOOL *goes out by side door, the last words being heard outside.* CUCHULAIN *and* CONCHUBAR *enter through the big door at the back. While they are still outside,* CUCHULAIN'S *voice is heard raised in anger. He is a dark man, something over forty years of age.* CONCHUBAR *is much older and carries a long staff, elaborately carved or with an elaborate gold handle.*

Cuchulain. Because I have killed men without your bidding
And have rewarded others at my own pleasure,
Because of half a score of trifling things
You'd lay this oath upon me, and now—and now

You add another pebble to the heap.
And I must be your man, well-nigh your bondsman,
Because a youngster out of Aoife's country.
Has found the shore ill-guarded.
Conchubar. He came to land
While you were somewhere out of sight and hearing,
Hunting or dancing with your wild companions.
Cuchulain. He can be driven out. I'll not be bound.
I'll dance or hunt, or quarrel or make love,
Wherever and whenever I've a mind to.
If time had not put water in your blood,
You never would have thought it.
Conchubar. I would leave
A strong and settled country to my children.
Cuchulain. And I must be obedient in all things;
Give up my will to yours; go where you please;
Come when you call; sit at the council-board
Among the unshapely bodies of old men;
I whose mere name has kept this country safe,
I that in early days have driven out
Maeve of Cruachan and the northern pirates,
The hundred kings of Sorcha, and the kings
Out of the Garden in the East of the World.
Must I, that held you on the throne when all
Had pulled you from it, swear obedience
As if I were some cattle-raising king?
Are my shins speckled with the heat of the fire,
Or have my hands no skill but to make figures
Upon the ashes with a stick? Am I
So slack and idle that I need a whip
Before I serve you?
Conchubar. No, no whip, Cuchulain,
But every day my children come and say:

'This man is growing harder to endure.
How can we be at safety with this man
That nobody can buy or bid or bind?
We shall be at his mercy when you are gone;
He burns the earth as if he were a fire,
And time can never touch him.'

Cuchulain. And so the tale
Grows finer yet; and I am to obey
Whatever child you set upon the throne,
As if it were yourself!

Conchubar. Most certainly.
I am High King, my son shall be High King;
And you for all the wildness of your blood,
And though your father came out of the sun,
Are but a little king and weigh but light
In anything that touches government,
If put into the balance with my children.

Cuchulain. It's well that we should speak our minds out plainly,
For when we die we shall be spoken of
In many countries. We in our young days
Have seen the heavens like a burning cloud
Brooding upon the world, and being more
Than men can be now that cloud 's lifted up,
We should be the more truthful. Conchubar,
I do not like your children—they have no pith,
No marrow in their bones, and will lie soft
Where you and I lie hard.

Conchubar. You rail at them
Because you have no children of your own.

Cuchulain. I think myself most lucky that I leave
No pallid ghost or mockery of a man
To drift and mutter in the corridors,

Where I have laughed and sung.
Conchubar. That is not true,
For all your boasting of the truth between us;
For there is no man having house and lands,
That have been in the one family
And called by the one name for centuries,
But is made miserable if he know
They are to pass into a stranger's keeping,
As yours will pass.
Cuchulain. The most of men feel that,
But you and I leave names upon the harp.
Conchubar. You play with arguments as lawyers do,
And put no heart in them. I know your thoughts,
For we have slept under the one cloak and drunk
From the one wine cup. I know you to the bone.
I have heard you cry, aye in your very sleep,
'I have no son,' and with such bitterness
That I have gone upon my knees and prayed
That it might be amended.
Cuchulain. For you thought
That I should be as biddable as others
Had I their reason for it; but that 's not true;
For I would need a weightier argument
Than one that marred me in the copying,
As I have that clean hawk out of the air
That, as men say, begot this body of mine
Upon a mortal woman.
Conchubar. Now as ever
You mock at every reasonable hope,
And would have nothing, or impossible things.
What eye has ever looked upon the child
Would satisfy a mind like that?
Cuchulain. I would leave

My house and name to none that would not face
Even myself in battle.
Conchubar. Being swift of foot,
And making light of every common chance,
You should have overtaken on the hills
Some daughter of the air, or on the shore
A daughter of the Country-under-Wave.
Cuchulain. I am not blasphemous.
Conchubar. Yet you despise
Our queens, and would not call a child your own,
If one of them had borne him.
Cuchulain. I have not said it.
Conchubar. Ah! I remember I have heard you boast,
When the ale was in your blood, that there was one
In Scotland, where you had learnt the trade of war,
That had a stone-pale cheek and red-brown hair;
And that although you had loved other women,
You'd sooner that fierce woman of the camp
Bore you a son than any queen among them.
Cuchulain. You call her a 'fierce woman of the camp,'
For having lived among the spinning-wheels,
You'd have no woman near that would not say,
'Ah! how wise!' 'What will you have for supper?'
'What shall I wear that I may please you, sir?'
And keep that humming through the day and night
Forever. A fierce woman of the camp!
But I am getting angry about nothing.
You have never seen her. Ah! Conchubar, had you
seen her
With that high, laughing, turbulent head of hers
Thrown backward, and the bow-string at her ear,
Or sitting at the fire with those grave eyes
Full of good counsel as it were with wine,

Or when love ran through all the lineaments
Of her wild body—although she had no child,
None other had all beauty, queen, or lover,
Or was so fitted to give birth to kings.

Conchubar. There's nothing I can say but drifts you farther
From the one weighty matter. That very woman—
For I know well that you are praising Aoife—
Now hates you and will leave no subtilty
Unknotted that might run into a noose
About your throat, no army in idleness
That might bring ruin on this land you serve.

Cuchulain. No wonder in that, no wonder at all in that.
I never have known love but as a kiss
In the mid-battle, and a difficult truce
Of oil and water, candles and dark night,
Hillside and hollow, the hot-footed sun,
And the cold, sliding, slippery-footed moon—
A brief forgiveness between opposites
That have been hatreds for three times the age
Of this long-'stablished ground.

Conchubar. Listen to me.
Aoife makes war on us, and every day
Our enemies grow greater and beat the walls
More bitterly, and you within the walls
Are every day more turbulent; and yet,
When I would speak about these things, your fancy
Runs as it were a swallow on the wind.

[*Outside the door in the blue light of the sea mist are many old and young* KINGS; *amongst them are three* WOMEN, *two of whom carry a bowl full of fire. The third, in what follows, puts from time to time fragrant herbs into the fire so that it flickers up into brighter flame.*

Look at the door and what men gather there—
Old counsellors that steer the land with me,
And younger kings, the dancers and harp-players
That follow in your tumults, and all these
Are held there by the one anxiety.
Will you be bound into obedience
And so make this land safe for them and theirs?
You are but half a king and I but half;
I need your might of hand and burning heart,
And you my wisdom.

Cuchulain. [*Going near to door.*] Nestlings of a high nest,
Hawks that have followed me into the air
And looked upon the sun, we'll out of this
And sail upon the wind once more. This king
Would have me take an oath to do his will,
And having listened to his tune from morning,
I will no more of it. Run to the stable
And set the horses to the chariot-pole,
And send a messenger to the harp-players.
We'll find a level place among the woods,
And dance awhile.

A Young King. Cuchulain, take the oath.
There is none here that would not have you take it.

Cuchulain. You'd have me take it? Are you of one mind?

The Kings. All, all, all, all!

A Young King. Do what the High King bids you.

Conchubar. There is not one but dreads this turbulence
Now that they're settled men.

Cuchulain. Are you so changed,
Or have I grown more dangerous of late?
But that's not it. I understand it all.

It's you that have changed. You've wives and children now,
And for that reason cannot follow one
That lives like a bird's flight from tree to tree.—
It's time the years put water in my blood
And drowned the wildness of it, for all 's changed,
But that unchanged.—I'll take what oath you will:
The moon, the sun, the water, light, or air,
I do not care how binding.

Conchubar. On this fire
That has been lighted from your hearth and mine;
The older men shall be my witnesses,
The younger, yours. The holders of the fire
Shall purify the thresholds of the house
With waving fire, and shut the outer door,
According to the custom; and sing rhyme
That has come down from the old law-makers
To blow the witches out. Considering
That the wild will of man could be oath-bound,
But that a woman's could not, they bid us sing
Against the will of woman at its wildest
In the shape-changers that run upon the wind.

[CONCHUBAR *has gone on to his throne.*

THE WOMEN.

[*They sing in a very low voice after the first few words so that the others all but drown their words.*

May this fire have driven out
The shape-changers that can put
Ruin on a great king's house
Until all be ruinous.
Names whereby a man has known
The threshold and the hearthstone,

Gather on the wind and drive
The women, none can kiss and thrive,
For they are but whirling wind,
Out of memory and mind.
They would make a prince decay
With light images of clay,
Planted in the running wave;
Or, for many shapes they have,
They would change them into hounds
Until he had died of his wounds,
Though the change were but a whim;
Or they'd hurl a spell at him,
That he follow with desire
Bodies that can never tire,
Or grow kind, for they anoint
All their bodies, joint by joint,
With a miracle-working juice
That is made out of the grease
Of the ungoverned unicorn.
But the man is thrice forlorn,
Emptied, ruined, wracked, and lost,
That they follow, for at most
They will give him kiss for kiss;
While they murmur, 'After this
Hatred may be sweet to the taste.'
Those wild hands that have embraced
All his body can but shove
At the burning wheel of love,
Till the side of hate comes up.
Therefore in this ancient cup
May the sword-blades drink their fill
Of the homebrew there, until
They will have for masters none
But the threshold and hearthstone.

Cuchulain. [*Speaking, while they are singing.*] I'll take
and keep this oath, and from this day
I shall be what you please, my chicks, my nestlings.
Yet I had thought you were of those that praised
Whatever life could make the pulse run quickly,
Even though it were brief, and that you held
That a free gift was better than a forced.—
But that 's all over.—I will keep it, too,
I never gave a gift and took it again.
If the wild horse should break the chariot-pole,
It would be punished. Should that be in the oath?

[*Two of the* WOMEN, *still singing, crouch in front of him holding the bowl over their heads. He spreads his hands over the flame.*

I swear to be obedient in all things
To Conchubar, and to uphold his children.

Conchubar. We are one being, as these flames are one:
I give my wisdom, and I take your strength.
Now thrust the swords into the flame, and pray
That they may serve the threshold and the hearthstone
With faithful service.

[*The* KINGS *kneel in a semicircle before the two* WOMEN *and* CUCHULAIN, *who thrusts his sword into the flame. They all put the points of their swords into the flame. The third* WOMAN *is at the back near the big door.*

Cuchulain. O pure, glittering ones
That should be more than wife or friend or mistress
Give us the enduring will, the unquenchable hope,
The friendliness of the sword!—

[*The song grows louder, and the last words ring out clearly. There is a loud knocking at the door, and a cry of* 'Open! open!'

Conchubar. Some king that has been loitering on the way.

Open the door, for I would have all know
That the oath 's finished and Cuchulain bound,
And that the swords are drinking up the flame.

[*The door is opened by the third* WOMAN, *and a* YOUNG MAN *with a drawn sword enters.*

Young Man. I am of Aoife's army.

[*The* KINGS *rush towards him.* CUCHULAIN *throws himself between.*

Cuchulain. Put up your swords.
He is but one. Aoife is far away.

Young Man. I have come alone into the midst of you
To weigh this sword against Cuchulain's sword.

Conchubar. And are you noble? for if of common seed,
Yon cannot weigh your sword against his sword
But in mixed battle.

Young Man. I am under bonds
To tell my name to no man; but it's noble.

Conchubar. But I would know your name and not your bonds.
You cannot speak in the Assembly House,
If you are not noble.

First Old King. Answer the High King!

Young Man. I will give no other proof than the hawk gives—
That it's no sparrow!

[*He is silent for a moment, then speaks to all.*

Yet look upon me, kings.
I, too, am of that ancient seed, and carry
The signs about this body and in these bones.

Cuchulain. To have shown the hawk's grey feather is enough,
And you speak highly, too. Give me that helmet.
I'd thought they had grown weary sending champions.

That sword and belt will do. This fighting 's welcome.
The High King there has promised me his wisdom;
But the hawk 's sleepy till its well-beloved
Cries out amid the acorns, or it has seen
Its enemy like a speck upon the sun.
What 's wisdom to the hawk, when that clear eye
Is burning nearer up in the high air?
[*Looks hard at* YOUNG MAN; *then comes down steps and grasps* YOUNG MAN *by shoulder.*
Hither into the light.
[*To* CONCHUBAR.] The very tint
Of her that I was speaking of but now.
Not a pin's difference.
[*To* YOUNG MAN.] You are from the North
Where there are many that have that tint of hair—
Red-brown, the light red-brown. Come nearer, boy,
For I would have another look at you.
There 's more likeness—a pale, a stone-pale cheek.
What brought you, boy? Have you no fear of death?

Young Man. Whether I live or die is in the gods' hands.

Cuchulain. That is all words, all words; a young man's talk.

I am their plough, their harrow, their very strength;
For he that 's in the sun begot this body
Upon a mortal woman, and I have heard tell
It seemed as if he had outrun the moon;
That he must follow always through waste heaven,
He loved so happily. He'll be but slow
To break a tree that was so sweetly planted.
Let 's see that arm. I'll see it if I choose.
That arm had a good father and a good mother,
But it is not like this.

Young Man. You are mocking me;
You think I am not worthy to be fought.
But I'll not wrangle but with this talkative knife.
Cuchulain. Put up your sword; I am not mocking you.
I'd have you for my friend, but if it's not
Because you have a hot heart and a cold eye,
I cannot tell the reason.
[*To* CONCHUBAR.] He has got her fierceness,
And nobody is as fierce as those pale women.
But I will keep him with me, Conchubar,
That he may set my memory upon her
When the day's fading.—You will stop with us,
And we will hunt the deer and the wild bulls;
And, when we have grown weary, light our fires
Between the wood and water, or on some mountain
Where the shape-changers of the morning come.
The High King there would make a mock of me
Because I did not take a wife among them.
Why do you hang your head? It's a good life:
The head grows prouder in the light of the dawn,
And friendship thickens in the murmuring dark
Where the spare hazels meet the wool-white foam.
But I can see there's no more need for words
And that you'll be my friend from this day out.
Conchubar. He has come hither not in his own name
But in Queen Aoife's, and has challenged us
In challenging the foremost man of us all.
Cuchulain. Well, well, what matter?
Conchubar. You think it does not matter;
And that a fancy lighter than the air,
A whim of the moment has more matter in it.
For having none that shall reign after you,

You cannot think as I do, who would leave
A throne too high for insult.
Cuchulain. Let your children
Re-mortar their inheritance, as we have,
And put more muscle on.—I'll give you gifts,
But I'd have something too—that arm-ring, boy.
We'll have this quarrel out when you are older.
Young Man. There is no man I'd sooner have my friend
Than you, whose name has gone about the world
As if it had been the wind; but Aoife 'd say
I had turned coward.
Cuchulain. I will give you gifts
That Aoife'll know, and all her people know,
To have come from me. [*Showing cloak.*
My father gave me this.
He came to try me, rising up at dawn
Out of the cold dark of the rich sea.
He challenged me to battle, but before
My sword had touched his sword, told me his name,
Gave me this cloak, and vanished. It was woven
By women of the Country-under-Wave
Out of the fleeces of the sea. O! tell her
I was afraid, or tell her what you will.
No; tell her that I heard a raven croak
On the north side of the house, and was afraid.
Conchubar. Some witch of the air has troubled Cuchulain's mind.
Cuchulain. No witchcraft. His head is like a woman's head
I had a fancy for.
Conchubar. A witch of the air
Can make a leaf confound us with memories.

They run upon the wind and hurl the spells
That make us nothing, out of the invisible wind.
They have gone to school to learn the trick of it.
Cuchulain. No, no—there 's nothing out of common here;
The winds are innocent.—That arm-ring, boy.
A King. If I've your leave I'll take this challenge up.
Another King. No, give it me, High King, for this wild Aoife
Has carried off my slaves.
Another King. No, give it me,
For she has harried me in house and herd.
Another King. I claim this fight.
Other Kings. [*Together.*] And I! And I! And I!
Cuchulain. Back! back! Put up your swords! Put up your swords!
There 's none alive that shall accept a challenge
I have refused. Laegaire, put up your sword!
Young Man. No, let them come. If they've a mind for it,
I'll try it out with any two together.
Cuchulain. That 's spoken as I'd have spoken it at your age.
But you are in my house. Whatever man
Would fight with you shall fight it out with me.
They're dumb, they're dumb. How many of you would meet [*Draws sword.*
This mutterer, this old whistler, this sand-piper,
This edge that 's greyer than the tide, this mouse
That 's gnawing at the timbers of the world,
This, this—— Boy, I would meet them all in arms
If I'd a son like you. He would avenge me
When I have withstood for the last time the men

Whose fathers, brothers, sons, and friends I have killed
Upholding Conchubar, when the four provinces
Have gathered with the ravens over them.
But I'd need no avenger. You and I
Would scatter them like water from a dish.
Young Man. We'll stand by one another from this out.
Here is the ring.
Cuchulain. No, turn and turn about.
But my turn 's first because I am the older.
[*Spreading out cloak.*
Nine queens out of the Country-under-wave
Have woven it with the fleeces of the sea
And they were long embroidering at it.—Boy,
If I had fought my father, he'd have killed me,
As certainly as if I had a son
And fought with him, I should be deadly to him;
For the old fiery fountains are far off
And every day there is less heat o' the blood.
Conchubar. [*In a loud voice.*] No more of this. I will not have this friendship.
Cuchulain is my man, and I forbid it.
He shall not go unfought, for I myself—
Cuchulain. I will not have it.
Conchubar. You lay commands on me?
Cuchulain. [*Seizing* CONCHUBAR.] You shall not stir, High King. I'll hold you there.
Conchubar. Witchcraft has maddened you.
The Kings. [*Shouting.*] Yes, witchcraft! witchcraft!
First Old King. Some witch has worked upon your mind, Cuchulain.
The head of that young man seemed like a woman's
You'd had a fancy for. Then of a sudden
You laid your hands on the High King himself!

Cuchulain. And laid my hands on the High King himself?

Conchubar. Some witch is floating in the air above us.

Cuchulain. Yes, witchcraft, witchcraft! Witches of the air!

[*To* YOUNG MAN.] Why did you? Who was it set you to this work?

Out, out! I say, for now it's sword on sword!

Young Man. But . . . but I did not.

Cuchulain. Out, I say, out, out!

[YOUNG MAN *goes out followed by* CUCHULAIN. *The* KINGS *follow them out with confused cries, and words one can hardly hear because of the noise. Some cry,* 'Quicker, quicker!' 'Why are you so long at the door?' 'We'll be too late!' 'Have they begun to fight?' *and so on; and one, it may be,* 'I saw him fight with Ferdia!' *Their voices drown each other. The three* Women *are left alone.*

First Woman. I have seen, I have seen!

Second Woman. What do you cry aloud?

First Woman. The ever-living have shown me what 's to come.

Third Woman. How? Where?

First Woman. In the ashes of the bowl.

Second Woman. While you were holding it between your hands?

Third Woman. Speak quickly!

First Woman. I have seen Cuchulain's roof-tree Leap into fire, and the walls split and blacken.

Second Woman. Cuchulain has gone out to die.

Third Woman. O! O!

Second Woman. Who could have thought that one so great as he

Should meet his end at this unnoted sword!

First Woman. Life drifts between a fool and a blind man
To the end, and nobody can know his end.

Second Woman. Come, look upon the quenching of this greatness.

[*The other two go to the door, but they stop for a moment upon the threshold and wail.*

First Woman. No crying out, for there'll be need of cries
And knocking at the breast when it's all finished.

[*The* WOMEN *go out. There is the sound of clashing swords from time to time during what follows.*

[*Enter the* FOOL *dragging the* BLIND MAN.

Fool. You have eaten it, you have eaten it! You have left me nothing but the bones.

[*He throws* BLIND MAN *down by big chair.*

Blind Man. O, that I should have to endure such a plague! O, I ache all over! O, I am pulled to pieces! This is the way you pay me all the good I have done you.

Fool. You have eaten it! You have told me lies. I might have known you had eaten it when I saw your slow, sleepy walk. Lie there till the kings come. O, I will tell Conchubar and Cuchulain and all the kings about you!

Blind Man. What would have happened to you but for me, and you without your wits? If I did not take care of you, what would you do for food and warmth?

Fool. You take care of me! You stay safe, and send me into every kind of danger. You sent me down the cliff for gulls' eggs while you warmed your blind eyes in the sun; and then you ate all that were good for food.

You left me the eggs that were neither egg nor bird. [BLIND MAN *tries to rise;* FOOL *makes him lie down again.*] Keep quiet now, till I shut the door. There is some noise outside—a high vexing noise, so that I can't be listening to myself. [*Shuts the big door.*] Why can't they be quiet! why can't they be quiet! [BLIND MAN *tries to get away.*] Ah! you would get away, would you! [*Follows* BLIND MAN *and brings him back.*] Lie there! lie there! No, you won't get away! Lie there till the kings come. I'll tell them all about you. I will tell it all. How you sit warming yourself, when you have made me light a fire of sticks, while I sit blowing it with my mouth. Do you not always make me take the windy side of the bush when it blows, and the rainy side when it rains?

Blind Man. Oh, good Fool! listen to me. Think of the care I have taken of you. I have brought you to many a warm hearth, where there was a good welcome for you, but you would not stay there; you were always wandering about.

Fool. The last time you brought me in it was not I who wandered away, but you that got put out because you took the crubeen out of the pot when nobody was looking. Keep quiet, now!

Cuchulain. [*Rushing in.*] Witchcraft! There is no witchcraft on the earth, or among the witches of the air, that these hands cannot break.

Fool. Listen to me, Cuchulain. I left him turning the fowl at the fire. He ate it all, though I had stolen it. He left me nothing but the feathers.

Cuchulain. Fill me a horn of ale!

Blind Man. I gave him what he likes best. You do not know how vain this fool is. He likes nothing so well as a feather.

Fool. He left me nothing but the bones and feathers. Nothing but the feathers, though I had stolen it.

Cuchulain. Give me that horn! Quarrels here, too! [*Drinks.*] What is there between you two that is worth a quarrel? Out with it!

Blind Man. Where would he be but for me? I must be always thinking—thinking to get food for the two of us, and when we've got it, if the moon is at the full or the tide on the turn, he'll leave the rabbit in the snare till it is full of maggots, or let the trout slip back through his hands into the stream.

[*The* Fool *has begun singing while the* Blind Man *is speaking.*

Fool. [*Singing.*]

When you were an acorn on the tree-top,
Then was I an eagle cock;
Now that you are a withered old block,
Still am I an eagle cock.

Blind Man. Listen to him, now. That 's the sort of talk I have to put up with day out, day in.

[*The* Fool *is putting the feathers into his hair.* Cuchulain *takes a handful of feathers out of a heap the* Fool *has on the bench beside him, and out of the* Fool's *hair, and begins to wipe the blood from his sword with them.*

Fool. He has taken my feathers to wipe his sword. It is blood that he is wiping from his sword.

Cuchulain. [*Goes up to door at back and throws away feathers.*] They are standing about his body. They will not awaken him, for all his witchcraft.

Blind Man. It is that young champion that he has killed. He that came out of Aoife's country.

Cuchulain. He thought to have saved himself with witchcraft.

Fool. That blind man there said he would kill you. He came from Aoife's country to kill you. That blind man said they had taught him every kind of weapon that he might do it. But I always knew that you would kill him.

Cuchulain. [*To the* BLIND MAN.] You knew him, then?

Blind Man. I saw him, when I had my eyes, in Aoife's country.

Cuchulain. You were in Aoife's country?

Blind Man. I knew him and his mother there.

Cuchulain. He was about to speak of her when he died.

Blind Man. He was a queen's son.

Cuchulain. What queen? what queen? [*Seizes* BLIND MAN, *who is now sitting upon the bench.*] Was it Scathach? There were many queens. All the rulers there were queens.

Blind Man. No, not Scathach.

Cuchulain. It was Uathach, then? Speak! speak!

Blind Man. I cannot speak; you are clutching me too tightly. [CUCHULAIN *lets him go.*] I cannot remember who it was. I am not certain. It was some queen.

Fool. He said a while ago that the young man was Aoife's son.

Cuchulain. She? No, no! She had no son when I was there.

Fool. That blind man there said that she owned him for her son.

Cuchulain. I had rather he had been some other woman's son. What father had he? A soldier out of

Alba? She was an amorous woman—a proud, pale, amorous woman.

Blind Man. None knew whose son he was.

Cuchulain. None knew! Did you know, old listener at doors?

Blind Man. No, no; I knew nothing.

Fool. He said awhile ago that he heard Aoife boast that she'd never but the one lover, and he the only man that had overcome her in battle. [*Pause.*

Blind Man. Somebody is trembling, Fool! The bench is shaking. Why are you trembling? Is Cuchulain going to hurt us? It was not I who told you, Cuchulain.

Fool. It is Cuchulain who is trembling. It is Cuchulain who is shaking the bench.

Blind Man. It is his own son he has slain.

Cuchulain. 'Twas they that did it, the pale, windy people.
Where? where? where? My sword against the thunder!
But no, for they have always been my friends;
And though they love to blow a smoking coal
Till it 's all flame, the wars they blow aflame
Are full of glory, and heart-uplifting pride,
And not like this. The wars they love awaken
Old fingers and the sleepy strings of harps.
Who did it then? Are you afraid? Speak out!
For I have put you under my protection,
And will reward you well. Dubthach the Chafer?
He'd an old grudge. No, for he is with Maeve.
Laegaire did it! Why do you not speak?
What is this house? [*Pause.*] Now I remember all.

[*Comes before* CONCHUBAR'S *chair, and strikes out with his sword, as if* CONCHUBAR *was sitting upon it.*

'Twas you who did it—you who sat up there

With your old rod of kingship, like a magpie
Nursing a stolen spoon. No, not a magpie,
A maggot that is eating up the earth!
Yes, but a magpie, for he 's flown away.
Where did he fly to?

Blind Man. He is outside the door.

Cuchulain. Outside the door?

Blind Man. Between the door and the sea.

Cuchulain. Conchubar, Conchubar! the sword into your heart!

[*He rushes out. Pause.* Fool *creeps up to the big door and looks after him.*

Fool. He is going up to King Conchubar. They are all about the young man. No, no, he is standing still. There is a great wave going to break, and he is looking at it. Ah! now he is running down to the sea, but he is holding up his sword as if he were going into a fight. [*Pause.*] Well struck! well struck!

Blind Man. What is he doing now?

Fool. Oh! he is fighting the waves!

Blind Man. He sees King Conchubar's crown on every one of them.

Fool. There, he has struck at a big one! He has struck the crown off it; he has made the foam fly. There again, another big one!

Blind Man. Where are the kings? What are the kings doing?

Fool. They are shouting and running down to the shore, and the people are running out of the houses. They are all running.

Blind Man. You say they are running out of the houses? There will be nobody left in the houses. Listen, Fool!

Fool. There, he is down! He is up again. He is going out in the deep water. There is a big wave. It has gone over him. I cannot see him now. He has killed kings and giants, but the waves have mastered him, the waves have mastered him!

Blind Man. Come here, Fool!

Fool. The waves have mastered him.

Blind Man. Come here!

Fool. The waves have mastered him.

Blind Man. Come here, I say.

Fool. [*Coming towards him, but looking backward towards the door.*] What is it?

Blind Man. There will be nobody in the houses. Come this way; come quickly! The ovens will be full. We will put our hands into the ovens. [*They go out.*

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

To Frank Fay

Because of his beautiful speaking in the character of Seanchan

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

KING GUAIRE
SEANCHAN (*pronounced* SHANAHAN)
HIS PUPILS
THE MAYOR OF KINVARA
TWO CRIPPLES
BRIAN (*an old servant*)
THE LORD HIGH CHAMBERLAIN
A SOLDIER
A MONK
COURT LADIES
TWO PRINCESSES
FEDELM

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

PROLOGUE.*

An OLD MAN *with a red dressing-gown, red slippers and red night-cap, holding a brass candlestick with a guttering candle in it, comes on from side of stage and goes in front of the dull green curtain.*

Old Man. I've got to speak the prologue. [*He shuffles on a few steps.*] My nephew, who is one of the play actors, came to me, and I in my bed, and my prayers said, and the candle put out, and he told me there were so many characters in this new play, that all the company were in it, whether they had been long or short at the business, and that there wasn't one left to speak the prologue. Wait a bit, there's a draught here. [*He pulls the curtain closer together.*] That's better. And that's why I am here, and maybe I'm a fool for my pains.

And my nephew said, there are a good many plays to be played for you, some to-night and some on other nights through the winter, and the most of them are simple enough, and tell out their story to the end. But as to the big play you are to see to-night, my nephew taught me to say what the poet had taught him to say about it. [*Puts down candlestick and puts right finger on left thumb.*] First, he who told the story of Seanchan on King Guaire's threshold long ago in the old books

* Written for the first production of *The King's Threshold* in Dublin, but not used, as, owing to the smallness of the company, nobody could be spared to speak it.—W.B.Y., 1904.

told it wrongly, for he was a friend of the king, or maybe afraid of the king, and so he put the king in the right. But he that tells the story now, being a poet, has put the poet in the right.

And then [*touches other finger*] I am to say: Some think it would be a finer tale if Seanchan had died at the end of it, and the king had the guilt at his door, for that might have served the poet's cause better in the end. But that is not true, for if he that is in the story but a shadow and an image of poetry had not risen up from the death that threatened him, the ending would not have been true and joyful enough to be put into the voices of players and proclaimed in the mouths of trumpets, and poetry would have been badly served.

[*He takes up the candlestick again.*

And as to what happened Seanchan after, my nephew told me he didn't know, and the poet didn't know, and it's likely there's nobody that knows. But my nephew thinks he never sat down at the king's table again, after the way he had been treated, but that he went to some quiet green place in the hills with Fedelm, his sweetheart, where the poor people made much of him because he was wise, and where he made songs and poems, and it's likely enough he made some of the old songs and the old poems the poor people on the hillsides are saying and singing to-day. [*A trumpet-blast.*

Well, it's time for me to be going. That trumpet means that the curtain is going to rise, and after a while the stage there will be filled up with great ladies and great gentlemen, and poets, and a king with a crown on him, and all of them as high up in themselves with the pride of their youth and their strength and their fine clothes as if there was no such thing in the world as cold in the

shoulders, and speckled shins, and the pains in the bones and the stiffness in the joints that make an old man that has the whole load of the world on him ready for his bed. [*He begins to shuffle away, and then stops.*

And it would be better for me, that nephew of mine to be thinking less of his play-acting, and to have remembered to boil down the knap-weed with a bit of threepenny sugar, for me to be wetting my throat with now and again through the night, and drinking a sup to ease the pains in my bones.

[*He goes out at side of stage.*

Steps before the Palace of KING GUAIRE *at Gort. A table in front of steps at one side, with food on it, and a bench by table.* SEANCHAN *lying on steps.* PUPILS *before steps.* KING *on the upper step before a curtained door.*

King. I welcome you that have the mastery
Of the two kinds of Music: the one kind
Being like a woman, the other like a man.
Both you that understand stringed instruments,
And how to mingle words and notes together
So artfully, that all the Art 's but Speech
Delighted with its own music; and you that carry
The long twisted horn, and understand
The heady notes that, being without words,
Can hurry beyond Time and Fate and Change.
For the high angels that drive the horse of Time—
The golden one by day, by night the silver—
Are not more welcome to one that loves the world
For some fair woman's sake.

I have called you hither
To save the life of your great master, Seanchan,
For all day long it has flamed up or flickered
To the fast cooling hearth.
Oldest Pupil. When did he sicken?
Is it a fever that is wasting him?
King. No fever or sickness. He has chosen death:
Refusing to eat or drink, that he may bring
Disgrace upon me; for there is a custom,
An old and foolish custom, that if a man
Be wronged, or think that he is wronged, and starve
Upon another's threshold till he die,
The common people, for all time to come,
Will raise a heavy cry against that threshold,
Even though it be the King's.
Oldest Pupil. My head whirls round;
I do not know what I am to think or say.
I owe you all obedience, and yet
How can I give it, when the man I have loved,
More than all others, thinks that he is wronged
So bitterly, that he will starve and die
Rather than bear it? Is there any man
Will throw his life away for a light issue?
King. It is but fitting that you take his side
Until you understand how light an issue
Has put us by the ears. Three days ago
I yielded to the outcry of my courtiers—
Bishops, Soldiers, and Makers of the Law—
Who long had thought it against their dignity
For a mere man of words to sit amongst them
At my own table. When the meal was spread
I ordered Seanchan to a lower table;
And when he pleaded for the poets' right,

Established at the establishment of the world,
I said that I was King, and that all rights
Had their original fountain in some king,
And that it was the men who ruled the world,
And not the men who sang to it, who should sit
Where there was the most honour. My courtiers—
Bishops, Soldiers, and Makers of the Law—
Shouted approval; and amid that noise
Seanchan went out, and from that hour to this
Although there is good food and drink beside him,
Has eaten nothing.

Oldest Pupil. I can breathe again.
You have taken a great burden from my mind,
For that old custom 's not worth dying for.

King. Persuade him to eat or drink. Till yesterday
I thought that hunger and weakness had been enough;
But finding them too trifling and too light
To hold his mouth from biting at the grave,
I called you hither, and all my hope 's in you,
And certain of his neighbours and good friends
That I have sent for. While he is lying there
Perishing, my good name in the world
Is perishing also. I cannot give way,
Because I am King. Because if I gave way,
My Nobles would call me a weakling, and it may be
The very throne be shaken.

Oldest Pupil. I will persuade him.
Your words had been enough persuasion, King;
But being lost in sleep or reverie,
He cannot hear them.

King. Make him eat or drink.
Nor is it all because of my good name
I'd have him do it, for he is a man

That might well hit the fancy of a king,
Banished out of his country, or a woman's
Or any other's that can judge a man
For what he is. But I that sit a throne,
And take my measure from the needs of the State,
Call his wild thought that overruns the measure,
Making words more than deeds, and his proud will
That would unsettle all, most mischievous,
And he himself a most mischievous man.
[*He turns to go, and then returns again.*
Promise a house with grass and tillage land,
An annual payment, jewels and silken ware,
Or anything but that old right of the poets.
[*He goes into palace.*

Oldest Pupil. The King did wrong to abrogate our right;
But Seanchan, who talks of dying for it,
Talks foolishly. Look at us, Seanchan;
Waken out of your dream and look at us,
Who have ridden under the moon and all the day,
Until the moon has all but come again,
That we might be beside you.

Seanchan. [*Half turning round, leaning on his elbow, and speaking as if in a dream.*] I was but now
In Almhuin, in a great high-raftered house,
With Finn and Osgar. Odours of roast flesh
Rose round me, and I saw the roasting spits;
And then the dream was broken, and I saw
Grania dividing salmon by a stream.

Oldest Pupil. Hunger has made you dream of roasting flesh;
And though I all but weep to think of it,
The hunger of the crane, that starves himself

At the full moon because he is afraid
Of his own shadow and the glittering water,
Seems to me little more fantastical
Than this of yours.

Seanchan. Why, that 's the very truth.
It is as though the moon changed everything—
Myself and all that I can hear and see;
For when the heavy body has grown weak,
There 's nothing that can tether the wild mind
That, being moonstruck and fantastical,
Goes where it fancies. I had even thought
I knew your voice and face, but now the words
Are so unlikely that I needs must ask
Who is it that bids me put my hunger by.

Oldest Pupil. I am your oldest pupil, Seanchan;
The one that has been with you many years—
So many, that you said at Candlemas
That I had almost done with school, and knew
All but all that poets understand.

Seanchan. My oldest pupil? No, that cannot be,
For it is some one of the courtly crowds
That have been round about me from sunrise,
And I am tricked by dreams; but I'll refute them.
At Candlemas I bid that pupil tell me
Why poetry is honoured, wishing to know
If he had any weighty argument
For distant countries and strange, churlish kings.
What did he answer?

Oldest Pupil. I said the poets hung
Images of the life that was in Eden
About the child-bed of the world, that it,
Looking upon those images, might bear
Triumphant children. But why must I stand here,

Repeating an old lesson, while you starve?
Seanchan. Tell on, for I begin to know the voice.
What evil thing will come upon the world
If the Arts perish?
Oldest Pupil. If the Arts should perish,
The world that lacked them would be like a woman,
That looking on the cloven lips of a hare,
Brings forth a hare-lipped child.
Seanchan. But that 's not all:
For when I asked you how a man should guard
Those images, you had an answer also,
If you're the man that you have claimed to be,
Comparing them to venerable things
God gave to men before he gave them wheat.
Oldest Pupil. I answered—and the word was half your own—
That he should guard them as the Men of Dea
Guard their four treasures, as the Grail King guards
His holy cup, or the pale, righteous horse
The jewel that is underneath his horn,
Pouring out life for it as one pours out
Sweet heady wine. . . . But now I understand;
You would refute me out of my own mouth;
And yet a place at table, near the King,
Is nothing of great moment, Seanchan.
How does so light a thing touch poetry?

[SEANCHAN *is now sitting up. He still looks dreamily in front of him.*

Seanchan. At Candlemas you called this poetry
One of the fragile, mighty things of God,
That die at an insult.
Oldest Pupil. [*To other* PUPILS.] Give me some true answer,

For on that day we spoke about the Court,
And said that all that was insulted there
The world insulted, for the Courtly life,
Being the first comely child of the world,
Is the world's model. How shall I answer him?
Can you not give me some true argument?
I will not tempt him with a lying one.

Youngest Pupil. Oh, tell him that the lovers of his music
Have need of him.

Seanchan. But I am labouring
For some that shall be born in the nick o' time,
And find sweet nurture, that they may have voices,
Even in anger, like the strings of harps;
And how could they be born to majesty
If I had never made the golden cradle?

Youngest Pupil. [*Throwing himself at* SEANCHAN'S *feet.*]
Why did you take me from my father's fields?
If you would leave me now, what shall I love?
Where shall I go? What shall I set my hand to?
And why have you put music in my ears,
If you would send me to the clattering houses?
I will throw down the trumpet and the harp,
For how could I sing verses or make music
With none to praise me, and a broken heart?

Seanchan. What was it that the poets promised you,
If it was not their sorrow? Do not speak.
Have I not opened school on these bare steps,
And are not you the youngest of my scholars?
And I would have all know that when all falls
In ruin, poetry calls out in joy,
Being the scattering hand, the bursting pod,
The victim's joy among the holy flame,
God's laughter at the shattering of the world.

And now that joy laughs out, and weeps and burns
On these bare steps.

Youngest Pupil. O master, do not die!

Oldest Pupil. Trouble him with no useless argument.
Be silent! There is nothing we can do
Except find out the King and kneel to him,
And beg our ancient right.
For here are some
To say whatever we could say and more,
And fare as badly. Come, boy, that is no use.
[*Raises* YOUNGEST PUPIL.
If it seem well that we beseech the King,
Lay down your harps and trumpets on the stones
In silence, and come with me silently.
Come with slow footfalls, and bow all your heads,
For a bowed head becomes a mourner best.

[*They lay harps and trumpets down one by one, and then go out very solemnly and slowly, following one another. Enter* MAYOR, TWO CRIPPLES, *and* BRIAN, *an old servant. The* MAYOR, *who has been heard, before he came upon the stage, muttering* 'Chief Poet,' 'Ireland,' etc., *crosses in front of* SEANCHAN *to the other side of the steps.* BRIAN *takes food out of basket. The* CRIPPLES *are watching the basket. The* MAYOR *has an Ogham stick in his hand.*

Mayor. [*As he crosses.*] 'Chief Poet,' 'Ireland,' 'Townsman,' 'Grazing land.'
Those are the words I have to keep in mind—
'Chief Poet.' 'Ireland,' 'Townsman,' 'Grazing land.'
I have the words. They are all upon the Ogham.
'Chief Poet,' 'Ireland,' 'Townsman,' 'Grazing land.'
But what 's their order?

[*He keeps muttering over his speech during what follows.*

First Cripple. The King were rightly served
If Seanchan drove his good luck away.
What 's there about a king, that 's in the world
From birth to burial like another man,
That he should change old customs, that were in it
As long as ever the world has been a world?
Second Cripple. If I were king I would not meddle with him,
For there is something queer about a poet.
I knew of one that would be making rhyme
Under a thorn at crossing of three roads.
He was as ragged as ourselves, and yet
He was no sooner dead than every thorn tree
From Inchy to Kiltartan withered away.
First Cripple. The King is but a fool!
Mayor. I am getting ready.
First Cripple. A poet has power from beyond the world,
That he may set our thoughts upon old times,
And lucky queens and little holy fish
That rise up every seventh year——
Mayor. Hush! hush!
First Cripple. To cure the crippled.
Mayor. I am half ready now.
Brian. There 's not a mischief I'd begrudge the King
If it were any other——
Mayor. Hush! I am ready.
Brian. That died to get it. I have brought out the food,
And if my master will not eat of it,
I'll home and get provision for his wake,
For that 's no great way off. Well, have your say,
But don't be long about it.
Mayor. [*Goes close to* SEANCHAN.] Chief Poet of Ireland,

I am the Mayor of your own town Kinvara,
And I am come to tell you that the news
Of this great trouble with the King of Gort
Has plunged us in deep sorrow—part for you,
Our honoured townsman, part for our good town.
[*Begins to hesitate; scratching his head.*
But what comes now? Something about the King.
Brian. Get on! get on! The food is all set out.
Mayor. Don't hurry me.
First Cripple. Give us a taste of it.
He'll not begrudge it.
Second Cripple. Let them that have their limbs
Starve if they will. We have to keep in mind
The stomach God has left us.
Mayor. Hush! I have it!
The King was said to be most friendly to us,
And we have reason, as you'll recollect,
For thinking that he was about to give
Those grazing lands inland we so much need,
Being pinched between the water and the stones.
Our mowers mow with knives between the stones;
The sea washes the meadows. You know well
We have asked nothing but what 's reasonable.
Seanchan. Reason in plenty. Yellowy white hair,
A hollow face, and not too many teeth.
How comes it he has been so long in the world
And not found Reason out?
[*While saying this he has turned half round. He hardly looks at the* MAYOR.
Brian. [*Trying to pull* MAYOR *away.*] What good is there
In telling him what he has heard all day!
I will set food before him.

Mayor. [*Shoving* BRIAN *away.*] Don't hurry me!
It's small respect you're showing to the town!
Get farther off! [*To* SEANCHAN.] We would not have
you think,
Weighty as these considerations are,
That they have been as weighty in our minds
As our desire that one we take much pride in,
A man that 's been an honour to our town,
Should live and prosper; therefore we beseech you
To give way in a matter of no moment,
A matter of mere sentiment—a trifle—
That we may always keep our pride in you.

[*He finishes this speech with a pompous air, motions to* BRIAN *to bring the food to* SEANCHAN, *and sits on seat.*

Brian. Master, master, eat this! It's not king's food,
That 's cooked for everybody and nobody.
Here 's barley-bread out of your father's oven,
And dulse from Duras. Here is the dulse, your honour;
It's wholesome, and has the good taste of the sea.

[*Takes dulse in one hand and bread in other and presses them into* SEANCHAN'S *hands.* SEANCHAN *shows by his movement his different feeling to* BRIAN.

First Cripple. He has taken it, and there'll be nothing
left!

Second Cripple. Nothing at all, he wanted his own sort.
What 's honey to a cat, corn to a dog,
Or a green apple to a ghost in a churchyard?

Seanchan. [*Pressing food back into* BRIAN'S *hands.*] Eat
it yourself, for you have come a journey,
And it may be eat nothing on the way.

Brian. How could I eat it, and your honour starving!
It is your father sends it, and he cried
Because the stiffness that is in his bones

Prevented him from coming, and bid me tell you
That he is old, that he has need of you,
And that the people will be pointing at him,
And he not able to lift up his head,
If you should turn the King's favour away;
And he adds to it, that he cared you well,
And you in your young age, and that it's right
That you should care him now.

Seanchan. [*Who is now interested.*] And is that all?
What did my mother say!

Brian. She gave no message;
For when they told her you had it in mind to starve,
Or get again the ancient right of the poets,
She said: 'No message can do any good.
He will not send the answer that you want.
We cannot change him.' And she went indoors,
Lay down upon the bed, and turned her face
Out of the light. And thereupon your father
Said: 'Tell him that his mother sends no message,
Albeit broken down and miserable.' [*A pause.*
Here 's a pigeon's egg from Duras, and these others
Were laid by your own hens.

Seanchan. She has sent no message.
Our mothers know us; they know us to the bone.
They knew us before birth, and that is why
They know us even better than the sweethearts
Upon whose breasts we have lain.
Go quickly! Go
And tell them that my mother was in the right.
There is no answer. Go and tell them that.
Go tell them that she knew me.

Mayor. What is he saying?
I never understood a poet's talk

More than the baa of a sheep!

[*Comes over from seat.* SEANCHAN *turns away.*

You have not heard,
It may be, having been so much away,
How many of the cattle died last winter
From lacking grass, and that there was much sickness
Because the poor have nothing but salt fish
To live on through the winter?

Brian. Get away,
And leave the place to me! It 's my turn now,
For your sack 's empty!

Mayor. Is it 'get away'!
Is that the way I'm to be spoken to!
Am I not Mayor? Amn't I authority?
Amn't I in the King's place? Answer me that!

Brian. Then show the people what a king is like:
Pull down old merings and root custom up,
Whitewash the dunghills, fatten hogs and geese,
Hang your gold chain about an ass's neck,
And burn the blessed thorn trees out of the fields,
And drive what 's comely away!

Mayor. Holy Saint Coleman!

First Cripple. Fine talk! fine talk! What else does the King do?
He fattens hogs and drives the poet away!

Second Cripple. He starves the song-maker!

First Cripple. He fattens geese!

Mayor. How dare you take his name into your mouth!
How dare you lift your voice against the King!
What would we be without him?

Brian. Why do you praise him?
I will have nobody speak well of him,
Or any other king that robs my master.

Mayor. And had he not the right to? and the right
To strike your master's head off, being the King,
Or yours or mine? I say, 'Long live the King!
Because he does not take our heads from us.'
Call out, 'Long life to him!'

Brian. Call out for him!

[*Speaking at same time with* MAYOR.

There 's nobody 'll call out for him,
But smiths will turn their anvils,
The millers turn their wheels,
The farmers turn their churns,
The witches turn their thumbs,
Till he be broken and splintered into pieces.

Mayor. [*At same time with* BRIAN.] He might, if he'd a mind to it,
Be digging out our tongues,
Or dragging out our hair,
Or bleaching us like calves,
Or weaning us like lambs,
But for the kindness and the softness that is in him.

[*They gasp for breath.*

First Cripple. I'll curse him till I drop!

[*Speaking at same time as* SECOND CRIPPLE *and* MAYOR *and* BRIAN, *who have begun again.*

The curse of the poor be upon him,
The curse of the widows upon him,
The curse of the children upon him,
The curse of the bishops upon him,
Until he be as rotten as an old mushroom!

Second Cripple. [*Speaking at same time as* FIRST CRIPPLE *and* MAYOR *and* BRIAN.]

The curse of wrinkles be upon him!
Wrinkles where his eyes are,

Wrinkles where his nose is,
Wrinkles where his mouth is,
And a little old devil looking out of every wrinkle!

Brian. [*Speaking at same time with* MAYOR *and* CRIPPLES.] And nobody will sing for him,
And nobody will hunt for him,
And nobody will fish for him,
And nobody will pray for him,
But ever and always curse him and abuse him.

Mayor. [*Speaking at same time with* CRIPPLES *and* BRIAN.] What good is in a poet?
Has he money in a stocking,
Or cider in the cellar,
Or flitches in the chimney,
Or anything anywhere but his own idleness?

[BRIAN *seizes* MAYOR.

Mayor. Help! help! Am I not in authority?

Brian. That's how I'll shout for the King!

Mayor. Help! help! Am I not in the King's place?

Brian. I'll teach him to be kind to the poor!

Mayor. Help! help! Wait till we are in Kinvara!

First Cripple. [*Beating* MAYOR *on the legs with crutch.*] I'll shake the royalty out of his legs!

Second Cripple. [*Burying his nails in* MAYOR'S *face.*] I'll scrumble the ermine out of his skin!

[*The* CHAMBERLAIN *comes down steps shouting,* 'Silence! silence! silence!'

Chamberlain. How dare you make this uproar at the doors,
Deafening the very greatest in the land,
As if the farmyards and the rookeries
Had all been emptied!

First Cripple. It is the Chamberlain.

[CRIPPLES *go out.*

Chamberlain. Pick up the litter there, and get you gone!
Be quick about it! Have you no respect
For this worn stair, this all but sacred door,
Where suppliants and tributary kings
Have passed, and the world's glory knelt in silence?
Have you no reverence for what all other men
Hold honourable?
Brian. If I might speak my mind,
I'd say the King would have his luck again
If he would let my master have his rights.
Chamberlain. Pick up your litter! Take your noise away!
Make haste, and get the clapper from the bell!
Brian. [*Putting last of food into basket.*] What do the great and powerful care for rights
That have no armies!
[CHAMBERLAIN *begins shoving them out with his staff.*
Mayor. My lord, I am not to blame.
I'm the King's man, and they attacked me for it.
Brian. We have our prayers, our curses and our prayers,
And we can give a great name or a bad one.
[MAYOR *is shoving* BRIAN *out before him with one hand. He keeps his face to* CHAMBERLAIN, *and keeps bowing. The* CHAMBERLAIN *shoves him with his staff.*
Mayor. We could not make the poet eat, my lord.
[CHAMBERLAIN *shoves him with his staff.*
Much honoured [*is shoved again*]—honoured to speak with you, my lord;
But I'll go find the girl that he's to marry.
She's coming, but I'll hurry her, my lord.
Between ourselves, my lord [*is shoved again*], she is a great coaxer.

Much honoured, my lord. Oh, she 's the girl to do it;
For when the intellect is out, my lord,
Nobody but a woman 's any good. [*Is shoved again.*
Much honoured, my lord [*is shoved again*], much honoured, much honoured!

[*Is shoved out, shoving* BRIAN *out before him.*

[*All through this scene, from the outset of the quarrel,* SEANCHAN *has kept his face turned away, or hidden in his cloak. While the* CHAMBERLAIN *has been speaking, the* SOLDIER *and the* MONK *have come out of the palace. The* MONK *stands on top of steps at one side,* SOLDIER *a little down steps at the other side.* COURT LADIES *are seen at opening in the palace curtain behind* SOLDIER. CHAMBERLAIN *is in the centre.*

Chamberlain. [*To* SEANCHAN.] Well, you must be contented, for your work
Has roused the common sort against the King,
And stolen his authority. The State
Is like some orderly and reverend house,
Wherein the master, being dead of a sudden,
The servants quarrel where they have a mind to,
And pilfer here and there.

[*Pause, finding that* SEANCHAN *does not answer.*

How many days
Will you keep up this quarrel with the King,
And the King's nobles, and myself, and all,
Who'd gladly be your friends, if you would let them?

[*Going near to* MONK.

If you would try, you might persuade him, father.
I cannot make him answer me, and yet
If fitting hands would offer him the food,
He might accept it.

Monk. Certainly I will not.
I've made too many homilies, wherein
The wanton imagination of the poets
Has been condemned, to be his flatterer.
If pride and disobedience are unpunished
Who will obey?

Chamberlain. [*Going to other side towards* SOLDIER.]
If you would speak to him,
You might not find persuasion difficult,
With all the devils of hunger helping you.

Soldier. I will not interfere, and if he starve
For being obstinate and stiff in the neck,
'Tis but good riddance.

Chamberlain. One of us must do it.
It might be, if you'd reason with him, ladies,
He would eat something, for I have a notion
That if he brought misfortune on the King,
Or the King's house, we'd be as little thought of
As summer linen when the winter 's come.

First Girl. But it would be the greater compliment
If Peter 'd do it.

Second Girl. Reason with him, Peter.
Persuade him to eat; he 's such a bag of bones!

Soldier. I'll never trust a woman's word again!
There 's nobody that was so loud against him
When he was at the table; now the wind 's changed,
And you that could not bear his speech or his silence,
Would have him there in his old place again;
I do believe you would, but I won't help you.

Second Girl. Why will you be so hard upon us, Peter?
You know we have turned the common sort against us.
And he looks miserable.

First Girl. We cannot dance,

Because no harper will pluck a string for us.
Second Girl. I cannot sleep with thinking of his face.
First Girl. And I love dancing more than anything.
Second Girl. Do not be hard on us; but yesterday
A woman in the road threw stones at me.
You would not have me stoned?
First Girl. May I not dance?
Soldier. I will do nothing. You have put him out,
And now that he is out—well, leave him out.
First Girl. Do it for my sake, Peter.
Second Girl. And for mine.
[*Each girl as she speaks takes* PETER'S *hand with her right hand, stroking down his arm with her left. While* SECOND GIRL *is stroking his arm,* FIRST GIRL *leaves go and gives him the dish.*
Soldier. Well, well; but not your way.
[*To* SEANCHAN.] Here 's meat for you.
It has been carried from too good a table
For men like you, and I am offering it
Because these women have made a fool of me.
[*A pause.*
You mean to starve? You will have none of it?
I'll leave it there, where you can sniff the savour.
Snuff it, old hedgehog, and unroll yourself!
But if I were the King, I'd make you do it
With wisps of lighted straw.
Seanchan. You have rightly named me.
I lie rolled up under the ragged thorns
That are upon the edge of those great waters
Where all things vanish away, and I have heard
Murmurs that are the ending of all sound.
I am out of life; I am rolled up, and yet,
Hedgehog although I am, I'll not unroll

For you, King's dog! Go to the King, your master.
Crouch down and wag your tail, for it may be
He has nothing now against you, and I think
The stripes of your last beating are all healed.
[*The* SOLDIER *has drawn his sword.*
Chamberlain. [*Striking up sword.*] Put up your sword, sir; put it up, I say!
The common sort would tear you into pieces
If you but touched him.
Soldier. If he's to be flattered,
Petted, cajoled, and dandled into humour,
We might as well have left him at the table.
[*Goes to one side sheathing sword.*
Seanchan. You must need keep your patience yet awhile,
For I have some few mouthfuls of sweet air
To swallow before I have grown to be as civil
As any other dust.
Chamberlain. You wrong us, Seanchan.
There is none here but holds you in respect;
And if you'd only eat out of this dish,
The King would show how much he honours you.
[*Bowing and smiling.*
Who could imagine you'd so take to heart
Being put from the high table? I am certain
That you, if you will only think it over,
Will understand that it is men of law,
Leaders of the King's armies, and the like,
That should sit there.
Seanchan. Somebody has deceived you,
Or maybe it was your own eyes that lied,
In making it appear that I was driven
From the King's table. You have driven away

The images of them that weave a dance
By the four rivers in the mountain garden.
Chamberlain. You mean we have driven poetry away.
But that 's not altogether true, for I,
As you should know, have written poetry.
And often when the table has been cleared,
And candles lighted, the King calls for me,
And I repeat it him. My poetry
Is not to be compared with yours; but still,
Where I am honoured, poetry is honoured—
In some measure.
Seanchan. If you are a poet,
Cry out that the King's money would not buy,
Nor the high circle consecrate his head,
If poets had never christened gold, and even
The moon's poor daughter, that most whey-faced metal,
Precious; and cry out that none alive
Would ride among the arrows with high heart,
Or scatter with an open hand, had not
Our heady craft commended wasteful virtues.
And when that story 's finished, shake your coat
Where little jewels gleam on it, and say,
A herdsman, sitting where the pigs had trampled,
Made up a song about enchanted kings,
Who were so finely dressed, one fancied them
All fiery, and women by the churn
And children by the hearth caught up the song
And murmured it, until the tailors heard it.
Chamberlain. If you would but eat something you'd find out
That you have had these thoughts from lack of food,
For hunger makes us feverish.
Seanchan. Cry aloud,

That when we are driven out we come again
Like a great wind that runs out of the waste
To blow the tables flat; and thereupon
Lie down upon the threshold till the King
Restore to us the ancient right of the poets.
Monk. You cannot shake him. I will to the King,
And offer him consolation in his trouble,
For that man there has set his teeth to die.
And being one that hates obedience,
Discipline, and orderliness of life,
I cannot mourn him.
First Girl. 'Twas you that stirred it up.
You stirred it up that you might spoil our dancing.
Why shouldn't we have dancing? We're not in Lent.
Yet nobody will pipe or play to us;
And they will never do it if he die.
And that is why you are going.
Monk. What folly 's this?
First Girl. Well, if you did not do it, speak to him—
Use your authority; make him obey you.
What harm is there in dancing?
Monk. Hush! begone!
Go to the fields and watch the hurley players,
Or any other place you have a mind to.
This is not woman's work.
First Girl. Come! let's away!
We can do nothing here.
Monk. The pride of the poets!
Dancing, hurling, the country full of noise,
And King and Church neglected. Seanchan,
I'll take my leave, for you are perishing
Like all that let the wanton imagination
Carry them where it will, and it's not likely

I'll look upon your living face again.
Seanchan. Come nearer, nearer!
Monk. Have you some last wish?
Seanchan. Stoop down, for I would whisper it in your ear.
Has that wild God of your's, that was so wild
When you'd but lately taken the King's pay,
Grown any tamer? He gave you all much trouble.
Monk. Let go my habit!
Seanchan. Have you persuaded him
To chirp between two dishes when the King
Sits down to table?
Monk. Let go my habit, sir!
[*Crosses to centre of stage.*
Seanchan. And maybe he has learned to sing quite softly
Because loud singing would disturb the King,
Who is sitting drowsily among his friends
After the table has been cleared. Not yet!
[SEANCHAN *has been dragged some feet clinging to the* MONK'S *habit.*
You did not think that hands so full of hunger
Could hold you tightly. They are not civil yet.
I'd know if you have taught him to eat bread
From the King's hand, and perch upon his finger.
I think he perches on the King's strong hand.
But it may be that he is still too wild.
You must not weary in your work; a king
Is often weary, and he needs a God
To be a comfort to him.
[*The* MONK *plucks his habit away and goes into palace.* SEANCHAN *holds up his hand as if a bird perched upon it. He pretends to stroke the bird.*
A little God,

With comfortable feathers, and bright eyes.
First Girl. There will be no more dancing in our time,
For nobody will play the harp or the fiddle.
Let us away, for we cannot amend it,
And watch the hurley.
Second Girl. Hush! he is looking at us.
Seanchan. Yes, yes, go the hurley, go to the hurley,
Go to the hurley! Gather up your skirts—
Run quickly! You can remember many love songs;
I know it by the light that 's in your eyes—
But you'll forget them. You're fair to look upon.
Your feet delight in dancing, and your mouths
In the slow smiling that awakens love.
The mothers that have borne you mated rightly.
They'd little ears as thirsty as your ears
For many love songs. Go to the young men.
Are not the ruddy flesh and the thin flanks
And the broad shoulders worthy of desire?
Go from me! Here is nothing for your eyes.
But it is I that am singing you away—
Singing you to the young men.

[*The* TWO YOUNG PRINCESSES *come out of palace. While he has been speaking the* GIRLS *have shrunk back holding each other's hands.*

First Girl. Be quiet!
Look who it is has come out of the house.
Princesses, we are for the hurling field.
Will you go there?
First Princess. We will go with you, Aileen.
But we must have some words with Seanchan,
For we have come to make him eat and drink.
Chamberlain. I will hold out the dish and cup for him
While you are speaking to him of his folly,

If you desire it, Princess. [*He has taken dish and cup.*
First Princess. No, Finula
Will carry him the dish and I the cup.
We'll offer them ourselves. [*They take cup and dish.*
First Girl. They are so gracious;
The dear little Princesses are so gracious.
[PRINCESS *holds out her hand for* SEANCHAN *to kiss it. He does not move.*
Although she is holding out her hand to him,
He will not kiss it.
First Princess. My father bids us say
That, though he cannot have you at his table,
You may ask any other thing you like
And he will give it you. We carry you
With our own hands a dish and cup of wine.
First Girl. Oh, look! he has taken it! He has taken it!
The dear Princesses! I have always said
That nobody could refuse them anything.
[SEANCHAN *takes the cup in one hand. In the other he holds for a moment the hand of the* PRINCESS.
Seanchan. Oh long, soft fingers and pale finger-tips,
Well worthy to be laid in a king's hand!
Oh, you have fair white hands, for it is certain
There is uncommon whiteness in these hands.
But there is something comes into my mind,
Princess. A little while before your birth,
I saw your mother sitting by the road
In a high chair; and when a leper passed,
She pointed him the way into the town.
He lifted up his hand and blessed her hand—
I saw it with my own eyes. Hold out your hands;
I will find out if they are contaminated,
For it has come into my thoughts that maybe

The King has sent me food and drink by hands
That are contaminated. I would see all your hands.
You've eyes of dancers; but hold out your hands,
For it may be there are none sound among you.
[*The* PRINCESSES *have shrunk back in terror.*
First Princess. He has called us lepers.
[SOLDIER *draws sword.*
Chamberlain. He 's out of his mind,
And does not know the meaning of what he said.
Seanchan. [*Standing up.*] There 's no sound hand among you—no sound hand.
Away with you! away with all of you!
You are all lepers! There is leprosy
Among the plates and dishes that you have carried.
And wherefore have you brought me leper's wine?
[*He flings the contents of the cup in their faces.*
There, there! I have given it to you again. And now
Begone, or I will give my curse to you.
You have the leper's blessing, but you think
Maybe the bread will something lack in savour
Unless you mix my curse into the dough.
[*They go out hurriedly in all directions.* SEANCHAN *is staggering in the middle of the stage.*
Where did I say the leprosy had come from?
I said it came out of a leper's hand, [*Enter* CRIPPLES.
And that he walked the highway. But that 's folly,
For he was walking up there in the sky.
And there he is even now, with his white hand
Thrust out of the blue air, and blessing them
With leprosy.
First Cripple. He 's pointing at the moon
That 's coming out up yonder, and he calls it
Leprous, because the daylight whitens it.

Seanchan. He 's holding up his hand above them all—
King, noblemen, princesses—blessing all.
Who could imagine he'd have so much patience?
First Cripple. [*Clutching the other* CRIPPLE.] Come out of this!
Second Cripple. [*Pointing to food.*] If you don't need it, sir,
May we not carry some of it away?
[*They cross towards food and pass in front of* SEANCHAN.
Seanchan. Who 's speaking? Who are you?
First Cripple. Come out of this!
Second Cripple. Have pity on us, that must beg our bread
From table to table throughout the entire world,
And yet be hungry.
Seanchan. But why were you born crooked?
What bad poet did your mothers listen to
That you were born so crooked?
Cripple. Come away!
Maybe he 's cursed the food, and it might kill us.
Other Cripple. Yes, better come away. [*They go out.*
Seanchan. [*Staggering, and speaking wearily.*]
He has great strength
And great patience to hold his right hand there,
Uplifted, and not wavering about.
He is much stronger than I am, much stronger.
[*Sinks down on steps. Enter* MAYOR *and* FEDELM.
Fedelm. [*Her finger on her lips.*] Say nothing! I will get him out of this
Before I have said a word of food and drink;
For while he is on this threshold and can hear,
It may be, the voices that made mock of him,

He would not listen. I'd be alone with him.

[MAYOR *goes out.* FEDELM *goes to* SEANCHAN *and kneels before him.*

Seanchan! Seanchan! [*He remains looking into the sky.*
Can you not hear me, Seanchan?
It is myself.

[*He looks at her, dreamily at first, then takes her hand.*

Seanchan. Is this your hand, Fedelm?
I have been looking at another hand
That is up yonder.

Fedelm. I have come for you.

Seanchan. Fedelm, I did not know that you were here.

Fedelm. And can you not remember that I promised
That I would come and take you home with me
When I'd the harvest in? And now I've come,
And you must come away, and come on the instant.

Seanchan. Yes, I will come. But is the harvest in?
This air has got a summer taste in it.

Fedelm. But is not the wild middle of the summer
A better time to marry? Come with me now!

Seanchan. [*Seizing her by both wrists.*] Who taught you that? For it's a certainty,
Although I never knew it till last night,
That marriage, because it is the height of life,
Can only be accomplished to the full
In the high days of the year. I lay awake:
There had come a frenzy into the light of the stars,
And they were coming nearer, and I knew
All in a minute they were about to marry
Clods out upon the ploughlands, to beget
A mightier race than any that has been.
But some that are within there made a noise,
And frighted them away.

Fedelm. Come with me now!
We have far to go, and daylight 's running out.
Seanchan. The stars had come so near me that I caught
Their singing. It was praise of that great race
That would be haughty, mirthful, and white-bodied,
With a high head, and open hand, and how,
Laughing, it would take the mastery of the world.
Fedelm. But you will tell me all about their songs
When we're at home. You have need of rest and care,
And I can give them you when we're at home.
And therefore let us hurry, and get us home.
Seanchan. It's certain that there is some trouble here,
Although it's gone out of my memory.
And I would get away from it. Give me your help.
[*Trying to rise.*
But why are not my pupils here to help me?
Go, call my pupils, for I need their help.
Fedelm. Come with me now, and I will send for them,
For I have a great room that 's full of beds
I can make ready; and there is a smooth lawn
Where they can play at hurley and sing poems
Under an apple-tree.
Seanchan. I know that place:
An apple-tree, and a smooth level lawn
Where the young men can sway their hurley sticks.

[*Sings.*]

The four rivers that run there,
Through well-mown level ground,
Have come out of a blessed well
That is all bound and wound

By the great roots of an apple,
And all the fowl of the air
Have gathered in the wide branches
And keep singing there.

[FEDELM, *troubled, has covered her eyes with her hands.*

Fedelm. No, there are not four rivers, and those rhymes
Praise Adam's paradise.

Seanchan. I can remember now,
It's out of a poem I made long ago
About the Garden in the East of the World,
And how spirits in the images of birds
Crowd in the branches of old Adam's crab-tree.
They come before me now, and dig in the fruit
With so much gluttony, and are so drunk
With that harsh wholesome savour, that their feathers
Are clinging one to another with the juice.
But you would lead me to some friendly place,
And I would go there quickly.

Fedelm. [*Helping him to rise.*] Come with me.

[*He walks slowly, supported by her, till he comes to table.*

Seanchan. But why am I so weak? Have I been ill?
Sweetheart, why is it that I am so weak? [*Sinks on to seat.*

Fedelm. [*Goes to table.*] I'll dip this piece of bread into the wine,
For that will make you stronger for the journey.

Seanchan. Yes, give me bread and wine; that 's what I want,
For it is hunger that is gnawing me.

[*He takes bread from* FEDELM, *hesitates, and then thrusts it back into her hand.*

But, no; I must not eat it.

Fedelm. Eat, Seanchan.

For if you do not eat it you will die.

Seanchan. Why did you give me food? Why did you come?

For had I not enough to fight against
Without your coming?

Fedelm. Eat this little crust,
Seanchan, if you have any love for me.

Seanchan. I must not eat it—but that's beyond your wit.
Child! child! I must not eat it, though I die.

Fedelm. [*Passionately.*] You do not know what love is; for if you loved,
You would put every other thought away.
But you have never loved me.

Seanchan. [*Seizing her by wrist.*] You, a child,
Who have but seen a man out of the window,
Tell me that I know nothing about love,
And that I do not love you? Did I not say
There was a frenzy in the light of the stars
All through the livelong night, and that the night
Was full of marriages? But that fight's over,
And all that's done with, and I have to die.

Fedelm. [*Throwing her arms about him.*] I will not be put from you, although I think
I had not grudged it you if some great lady,
If the King's daughter, had set out your bed.
I will not give you up to death; no, no!
And are not these white arms and this soft neck
Better than the brown earth?

Seanchan. [*Struggling to disengage himself.*] Begone from me!
There's treachery in those arms and in that voice.
They're all against me. Why do you linger there?
How long must I endure the sight of you?

Fedelm. O, Seanchan! Seanchan!
Seanchan. [*Rising.*] Go where you will,
So it be out of sight and out of mind.
I cast you from me like an old torn cap,
A broken shoe, a glove without a finger,
A crooked penny; whatever is most worthless.
Fedelm. [*Bursts into tears.*] Oh, do not drive me from you!
Seanchan. [*Takes her in his arms.*] What did I say,
My dove of the woods? I was about to curse you.
It was a frenzy. I'll unsay it all.
But you must go away.
Fedelm. Let me be near you.
I will obey like any married wife.
Let me but lie before your feet.
Seanchan. Come nearer. [*Kisses her.*
If I had eaten when you bid me, sweetheart,
The kiss of multitudes in times to come
Had been the poorer.
[*Enter* KING *from palace, followed by the two* PRINCESSES.
King. [*To* FEDELM.] Has he eaten yet?
Fedelm No, King, and will not till you have restored
The right of the poets.
King. [*Coming down and standing before* SEANCHAN.] Seanchan, you have refused
Everybody that I have sent, and now
I come to you myself; and I have come
To bid you put your pride as far away
As I have put my pride. I had your love
Not a great while ago, and now you have planned
To put a voice by every cottage fire,
And in the night when no one sees who cries,
To cry against me till my throne has crumbled.

And yet if I give way I must offend
My courtiers and nobles till they, too,
Strike at the crown. What would you have of me?
Seanchan. When did the poets promise safety, King?
King. Seanchan, I bring you bread in my own hands,
And bid you eat because of all these reasons,
And for this further reason, that I love you.
[SEANCHAN *pushes bread away, with* FEDELM'S *hand.*
You have refused it, Seanchan?
Seanchan. We have refused it.
King. I have been patient, though I am a king,
And have the means to force you. But that 's ended,
And I am but a king, and you a subject.
Nobles and courtiers, bring the poets hither;
[*Enter* COURT LADIES, MONK, SOLDIER, CHAMBERLAIN, *and* COURTIERS *with* PUPILS, *who have halters round their necks.*
For you can have your way. I that was man,
With a man's heart, am now all king again,
Remembering that the seed I come of, though
A hundred kings have sown it and resown it,
Has neither trembled nor shrunk backward yet
Because of the hard business of a king.
Speak to your master; beg your life of him;
Show him the halter that is round your necks.
If his heart 's set upon it, he may die;
But you shall all die with him. [*Goes up steps.*
Beg your lives!
Begin, for you have little time to lose.
Begin it, you that are the oldest pupil.
Oldest Pupil. Die, Seanchan, and proclaim the right of the poets.
King. Silence! you are as crazy as your master.

But that young boy, that seems the youngest of you,
I'd have him speak. Kneel down before him, boy;
Hold up your hands to him, that you may pluck
That milky-coloured neck out of the noose.

Youngest Pupil. Die, Seanchan, and proclaim the right of the poets.

Oldest Pupil. Gather the halters up into your hands
And drive us where you will, for in all things,
But in our Art, we are obedient.

[*They hold the ends of the halter towards the* KING. *The* KING *comes slowly down steps.*

King. Kneel down, kneel down; he has the greater power.
There is no power but has its root in his—
I understand it now. There is no power
But his that can withhold the crown or give it,
Or make it reverend in the eyes of men,
And therefore I have laid it in his hands,
And I will do his will.

[*He has put the crown into* SEANCHAN'S *hands.*

Seanchan. [*Who has been assisted to rise by his* PUPILS.] O, crown! O, crown!
It is but right the hands that made the crown
In the old time should give it where they please.

[*He places the crown on the* KING'S *head.*

O, silver trumpets! Be you lifted up,
And cry to the great race that is to come.
Long-throated swans, amid the waves of Time,
Sing loudly, for beyond the wall of the world
It waits, and it may hear and come to us.

[*The* PUPILS *blow a trumpet blast.*

THE SHADOWY WATERS

To Lady Gregory

I walked among the seven woods of Coole,
Shan-walla, where a willow-bordered pond
Gathers the wild duck from the winter dawn;
Shady Kyle-dortha; sunnier Kyle-na-gno,
Where many hundred squirrels are as happy
As though they had been hidden by green boughs,
Where old age cannot find them; Pairc-na-lea,
Where hazel and ash and privet blind the paths;
Dim Pairc-na-carraig, where the wild bees fling
Their sudden fragrances on the green air;
Dim Pairc-na-tarav, where enchanted eyes
Have seen immortal, mild, proud shadows walk;
Dim Inchy wood, that hides badger and fox
And marten-cat, and borders that old wood
Wise Biddy Early called the wicked wood:
Seven odours, seven murmurs, seven woods.
I had not eyes like those enchanted eyes,
Yet dreamed that beings happier than men
Moved round me in the shadows, and at night
My dreams were cloven by voices and by fires;
And the images I have woven in this story
Of Forgael and Dectora and the empty waters
Moved round me in the voices and the fires,
And more I may not write of, for they that cleave
The waters of sleep can make a chattering tongue
Heavy like stone, their wisdom being half silence.

How shall I name you, immortal, mild, proud
shadows?
I only know that all we know comes from you,
And that you come from Eden on flying feet.
Is Eden far away, or do you hide
From human thought, as hares and mice and coneys
That run before the reaping-hook and lie
In the last ridge of the barley? Do our woods
And winds and ponds cover more quiet woods,
More shining winds, more star-glimmering ponds?
Is Eden out of time and out of space?
And do you gather about us when pale light
Shining on water and fallen among leaves,
And winds blowing from flowers, and whirr of
feathers
And the green quiet, have uplifted the heart?

I have made this poem for you, that men may read it
Before they read of Forgael and Dectora,
As men in the old times, before the harp began,
Poured out wine for the high invisible ones.

SEPTEMBER, 1900.

THE HARP OF AENGUS

Edain came out of Midher's hill, and lay
Beside young Aengus in his tower of glass,
Where time is drowned in odour-laden winds
And druid moons, and murmuring of boughs,
And sleepy boughs, and boughs where apples made
Of opal and ruby and pale chrysolite
Awake unsleeping fires; and wove seven strings,
Sweet with all music, out of his long hair,
Because her hands had been made wild by love;
When Midher's wife had changed her to a fly,
He made a harp with druid apple wood
That she among her winds might know he wept;
And from that hour he has watched over none
But faithful lovers.

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

FORGAEL
AIBRIC
SAILORS
DECTORA

THE SHADOWY WATERS.

SCENE: *The deck of an ancient ship. At the right of the stage is the mast, with a large square sail hiding a great deal of the sky and sea on that side. The tiller is at the left of the stage; it is a long oar coming through an opening in the bulwark. The deck rises in a series of steps behind the tiller, and the stern of the ship curves overhead. All the woodwork is of dark green; and the sail is dark green, with a blue pattern upon it, having a little copper colour here and there. The sky and sea are dark blue. All the persons of the play are dressed in various tints of green and blue, the men with helmets and swords of copper, the woman with copper ornaments upon her dress. When the play opens there are four persons upon the deck.* AIBRIC *stands by the tiller.* FORGAEL *sleeps upon the raised portion of the deck towards the front of the stage. Two* SAILORS *are standing near to the mast, on which a harp is hanging.*

First Sailor. Has he not led us into these waste seas
For long enough?

Second Sailor. Aye, long and long enough.

First Sailor. We have not come upon a shore or ship
These dozen weeks.

Second Sailor. And I had thought to make
A good round sum upon this cruise, and turn—
For I am getting on in life—to something
That has less ups and downs than robbery.

First Sailor. I am so lecherous with abstinence
I'd give the profit of nine voyages
For that red Moll that had but the one eye.
Second Sailor. And all the ale ran out at the new moon;
And now that time puts water in my blood,
The ale cup is my father and my mother.
First Sailor. It would be better to turn home again,
Whether he will or no; and better still
To make an end while he is sleeping there.
If we were of one mind I'd do it.
Second Sailor. Were 't not
That there is magic in that harp of his,
That makes me fear to raise a hand against him,
I would be of your mind; but when he plays it
Strange creatures flutter up before one's eyes,
Or cry about one's ears.
First Sailor. Nothing to fear.
Second Sailor. Do you remember when we sank that galley
At the full moon?
First Sailor. He played all through the night.
Second Sailor. Until the moon had set; and when I looked
Where the dead drifted, I could see a bird
Like a grey gull upon the breast of each.
While I was looking they rose hurriedly,
And after circling with strange cries awhile
Flew westward; and many a time since then
I've heard a rustling overhead in the wind.
First Sailor. I saw them on that night as well as you,
But when I had eaten and drunk a bellyful
My courage came again.

Second Sailor. But that's not all.
The other night, while he was playing it,
A beautiful young man and girl came up
In a white, breaking wave; they had the look
Of those that are alive for ever and ever.
First Sailor. I saw them, too, one night. Forgael was playing,
And they were listening there beyond the sail.
He could not see them, but I held out my hands
To grasp the woman.
Second Sailor. You have dared to touch her?
First Sailor. Oh, she was but a shadow, and slipped from me.
Second Sailor. But were you not afraid?
First Sailor. Why should I fear?
Second Sailor. 'Twas Aengus and Edain, the wandering lovers,
To whom all lovers pray.
First Sailor. But what of that?
A shadow does not carry sword or spear.
Second Sailor. My mother told me that there is not one
Of the ever-living half so dangerous
As that wild Aengus. Long before her day
He carried Edain off from a king's house,
And hid her among fruits of jewel-stone
And in a tower of glass; and from that day
Has hated every man that 's not in love,
And has been dangerous to him.
First Sailor. I have heard
He does not hate seafarers as he hates
Peaceable men that shut the wind away,
And keep to the one weary marriage-bed.

Second Sailor. I think that he has Forgael in his net,
And drags him through the sea.
First Sailor. Well, net or none,
I'd kill him while we have the chance to do it.
Second Sailor. It's certain I'd sleep easier o' nights
If he were dead; but who will be our captain,
Judge of the stars, and find a course for us?
First Sailor. I've thought of that. We must have Aibric with us,
For he can judge the stars as well as Forgael.
[*Going towards* AIBRIC.
Become our captain, Aibric. I am resolved
To make as end of Forgael while he sleeps.
There's not a man but will be glad of it
When it is over, nor one to grumble at us.
You'll have the captain's share of everything.
Aibric. Silence! for you have taken Forgael's pay.
First Sailor. We joined him for his pay, but have had none
This long while now; we had not turned against him
If he had brought us among peopled seas,
For that was in the bargain when we struck it.
What good is there in this hard way of living,
Unless we drain more flagons in a year
And kiss more lips than lasting peaceable men
In their long lives? If you'll be of our troop
You'll be as good a leader.
Aibric. Be of your troop!
No, nor with a hundred men like you,
When Forgael's in the other scale. I'd say it
Even if Forgael had not been my master
From earliest childhood, but that being so,
If you will draw that sword out of its scabbard
I'll give my answer.

First Sailor. You have awaked him.
[*To* SECOND SAILOR.] We'd better go, for we have lost
this chance. [*They go out.*
Forgael. Have the birds passed us? I could hear your
voice.
But there were others.
Aibric. I have seen nothing pass.
Forgael. You're certain of it? I never wake from sleep
But that I am afraid they may have passed,
For they're my only pilots. If I lost them
Straying too far into the north or south,
I'd never come upon the happiness
That has been promised me. I have not seen them
These many days; and yet there must be many
Dying at every moment in the world,
And flying towards their peace.
Aibric. Put by these thoughts,
And listen to me for awhile. The sailors
Are plotting for your death.
Forgael. Have I not given
More riches than they ever hoped to find?
And now they will not follow, while I seek
The only riches that have hit my fancy.
Aibric. What riches can you find in this waste sea
Where no ship sails, where nothing that's alive
Has ever come but those man-headed birds,
Knowing it for the world's end?
Forgael. Where the world ends
The mind is made unchanging, for it finds
Miracle, ecstasy, the impossible hope,
The flagstone under all, the fire of fires,
The roots of the world.
Aibric. Who knows that shadows

May not have driven you mad for their own sport?
Forgael. Do you, too, doubt me? Have you joined
their plot?
Aibric. No, no, do not say that. You know right well
That I will never lift a hand against you.
Forgael. Why should you be more faithful than the rest,
Being as doubtful?
Aibric. I have called you master
Too many years to lift a hand against you.
Forgael. Maybe it is but natural to doubt me.
You've never known, I'd lay a wager on it,
A melancholy that a cup of wine,
A lucky battle, or a woman's kiss
Could not amend.
Aibric. I have good spirits enough.
I've nothing to complain of but heartburn,
And that is cured by a boiled liquorice root.
Forgael. If you will give me all your mind awhile—
All, all, the very bottom of the bowl—
I'll show you that I am made differently,
That nothing can amend it but these waters,
Where I am rid of life—the events of the world—
What do you call it?—that old promise-breaker,
The cozening fortune-teller that comes whispering,
'You will have all you have wished for when you have
earned
Land for your children or money in a pot.'
And when we have it we are no happier,
Because of that old draught under the door,
Or creaky shoes. And at the end of all
We have been no better off than Seaghan the fool,
That never did a hand's turn. Aibric! Aibric!
We have fallen in the dreams the ever-living

Breathe on the burnished mirror of the world,
And then smooth out with ivory hands and sigh,
And find their laughter sweeter to the taste
For that brief sighing.

Aibric. If you had loved some woman—

Forgael. You say that also? You have heard the voices,
For that is what they say—all, all the shadows—
Aengus and Edain, those passionate wanderers,
And all the others; but it must be love
As they have known it. Now the secret's out;
For it is love that I am seeking for,
But of a beautiful, unheard-of kind
That is not in the world.

Aibric. And yet the world
Has beautiful women to please every man.

Forgael. But he that gets their love after the fashion
Loves in brief longing and deceiving hope
And bodily tenderness, and finds that even
The bed of love, that in the imagination
Had seemed to be the giver of all peace,
Is no more than a wine-cup in the tasting,
And as soon finished.

Aibric. All that ever loved
Have loved that way—there is no other way.

Forgael. Yet never have two lovers kissed but they
Believed there was some other near at hand,
And almost wept because they could not find it.

Aibric. When they have twenty years; in middle life
They take a kiss for what a kiss is worth,
And let the dream go by.

Forgael. It's not a dream,
But the reality that makes our passion
As a lamp shadow—no—no lamp, the sun.

What the world's million lips are thirsting for,
Must be substantial somewhere.
Aibric. I have heard the Druids
Mutter such things as they awake from trance.
It may be that the ever-living know it—
No mortal can.
Forgael. Yes; if they give us help.
Aibric. They are besotting you as they besot
The crazy herdsman that will tell his fellows
That he has been all night upon the hills,
Riding to hurley, or in the battle-host
With the ever-living.
Forgael. What if he speak the truth,
And for a dozen hours have been a part
Of that more powerful life?
Aibric. His wife knows better.
Has she not seen him lying like a log,
Or fumbling in a dream about the house?
And if she hear him mutter of wild riders,
She knows that it was but the cart-horse coughing
That set him to the fancy.
Forgael. All would be well
Could we but give us wholly to the dreams,
And get into their world that to the sense
Is shadow, and not linger wretchedly
Among substantial things; for it is dreams
That lift us to the flowing, changing world
That the heart longs for. What is love itself,
Even though it be the lightest of light love,
But dreams that hurry from beyond the world
To make low laughter more than meat and drink,
Though it but set us sighing? Fellow-wanderer,
Could we but mix ourselves into a dream,

Not in its image on the mirror!
Aibric. While
We're in the body that's impossible.
Forgael. And yet I cannot think they're leading me
To death; for they that promised to me love
As those that can outlive the moon have known it,
Had the world's total life gathered up, it seemed,
Into their shining limbs—I've had great teachers.
Aengus and Edain ran up out of the wave—
You'd never doubt that it was life they promised
Had you looked on them face to face as I did,
With so red lips, and running on such feet,
And having such wide-open, shining eyes.
Aibric. It's certain they are leading you to death.
None but the dead, or those that never lived,
Can know that ecstacy. Forgael! Forgael!
They have made you follow the man-headed birds,
And you have told me that their journey lies
Towards the country of the dead.
Forgael. What matter
If I am going to my death, for there,
Or somewhere, I shall find the love they have promised
That much is certain. I shall find a woman,
One of the ever-living, as I think—
One of the laughing people—and she and I
Shall light upon a place in the world's core,
Where passion grows to be a changeless thing,
Like charmed apples made of chrysoprase,
Of chrysoberyl, or beryl, or chrysolite;
And there, in juggleries of sight and sense,
Become one movement, energy, delight,
Until the overburthened moon is dead.

[*A number of* SAILORS *enter hurriedly.*

First Sailor. Look there! there in the mist! a ship of spice!
And we are almost on her!
Second Sailor. We had not known
But for the ambergris and sandalwood.
First Sailor. No; but opoponax and cinnamon.
Forgael. [*Taking the tiller from* AIBRIC.] The ever-living have kept my bargain for me,
And paid you on the nail.
Aibric. Take up that rope
To make her fast while we are plundering her.
First Sailor. There is a king and queen upon her deck,
And where there is one woman there'll be others.
Aibric. Speak lower, or they'll hear.
First Sailor. They cannot hear;
They are too busy with each other. Look!
He has stooped down and kissed her on the lips.
Second Sailor. When she finds out we have better men aboard
She may not be too sorry in the end.
First Sailor. She will be like a wild cat; for these queens
Care more about the kegs of silver and gold
And the high fame that come to them in marriage,
Than a strong body and a ready hand.
Second Sailor. There's nobody is natural but a robber,
And that is why the world totters about
Upon its bandy legs.
Aibric. Run at them now,
And overpower the crew while yet asleep!

[*The* SAILORS *go out.*

[*Voices and the clashing of swords are heard from the other ship, which cannot be seen because of the sail.*

A Voice. Armed men have come upon us! Oh, I am slain!
Another Voice. Wake all below!
Another Voice. Why have you broken our sleep?
First Voice. Armed men have come upon us! Oh, I am slain!
Forgael. [*Who has remained at the tiller.*] There! there they come! Gull, gannet, or diver,
But with a man's head, or a fair woman's,
They hover over the masthead awhile
To wait their friends; but when their friends have come
They'll fly upon that secret way of theirs.
One—and one—a couple—five together;
And I will hear them talking in a minute.
Yes, voices! but I do not catch the words.
Now I can hear. There 's one of them that says:
'How light we are, now we are changed to birds!'
Another answers: 'Maybe we shall find
Our heart's desire now that we are so light.'
And then one asks another how he died,
And says: 'A sword-blade pierced me in my sleep.'
And now they all wheel suddenly and fly
To the other side, and higher in the air.
And now a laggard with a woman's head
Comes crying, 'I have run upon the sword.
I have fled to my beloved in the air,
In the waste of the high air, that we may wander
Among the windy meadows of the dawn.'
But why are they still waiting? why are they
Circling and circling over the masthead?
What power that is more mighty than desire
To hurry to their hidden happiness
Withholds them now? Have the ever-living ones

A meaning in that circling overhead?
But what's the meaning? [*He cries out.*] Why do you
linger there?
Why do you not run to your desire,
Now that you have happy winged bodies?
[*His voice sinks again.*
Being too busy in the air and the high air,
They cannot hear my voice; but what's the meaning?
[*The* SAILORS *have returned.* DECTORA *is with them. She is dressed in pale green, with copper ornaments on her dress, and has a copper crown upon her head. Her hair is dull red.*
Forgael. [*Turning and seeing her.*] Why are you standing with your eyes upon me?
You are not the world's core. Oh no, no, no!
That cannot be the meaning of the birds.
You are not its core. My teeth are in the world,
But have not bitten yet.
Dectora. I am a queen,
And ask for satisfaction upon these
Who have slain my husband and laid hands upon me.
[*Breaking loose from the* SAILORS *who are holding her.*
Let go my hands!
Forgael. Why do you cast a shadow?
Where do you come from? Who brought you to this
place?
They would not send me one that casts a shadow.
Dectora. Would that the storm that overthrew my
ships,
And drowned the treasures of nine conquered nations,
And blew me hither to my lasting sorrow,
Had drowned me also. But, being yet alive,
I ask a fitting punishment for all

That raised their hands against him.
Forgael. There are some
That weigh and measure all in these waste seas—
They that have all the wisdom that's in life,
And all that prophesying images
Made of dim gold rave out in secret tombs;
They have it that the plans of kings and queens
Are dust on the moth's wing; that nothing matters
But laughter and tears—laughter, laughter and tears;
That every man should carry his own soul
Upon his shoulders.
Dectora. You've nothing but wild words,
And I would know if you will give me vengeance.
Forgael. When she finds out I will not let her go—
When she knows that.
Dectora. What is it that you are muttering—
That you'll not let me go? I am a queen.
Forgael. Although you are more beautiful than any,
I almost long that it were possible;
But if I were to put you on that ship,
With sailors that were sworn to do your will,
And you had spread a sail for home, a wind
Would rise of a sudden, or a wave so huge,
It had washed among the stars and put them out,
And beat the bulwark of your ship on mine,
Until you stood before me on the deck—
As now.
Dectora. Does wandering in these desolate seas
And listening to the cry of wind and wave
Bring madness?
Forgael. Queen, I am not mad.
Dectora. And yet you say the water and the wind
Would rise against me.

Forgael. No, I am not mad—
If it be not that hearing messages
From lasting watchers, that outlive the moon,
At the most quiet midnight is to be stricken.
Dectora. And did those watchers bid you take me captive?
Forgael. Both you and I are taken in the net.
It was their hands that plucked the winds awake
And blew you hither; and their mouths have promised
I shall have love in their immortal fashion.
They gave me that old harp of the nine spells
That is more mighty than the sun and moon,
Or than the shivering casting-net of the stars,
That none might take you from me.
Dectora. [*First trembling back from the mast where the harp is, and then laughing.*] For a moment
Your raving of a message and a harp
More mighty than the stars half troubled me.
But all that's raving. Who is there can compel
The daughter and grandaughter of kings
To be his bedfellow?
Forgael. Until your lips
Have called me their beloved, I'll not kiss them.
Dectora. My husband and my king died at my feet,
And yet you talk of love.
Forgael. The movement of time
Is shaken in these seas, and what one does
One moment has no might upon the moment
That follows after.
Dectora. I understand you now.
You have a Druid craft of wicked sound
Wrung from the cold women of the sea—
A magic that can call a demon up,

Until my body give you kiss for kiss.
Forgael. Your soul shall give the kiss.
Dectora. I am not afraid,
While there's a rope to run into a noose
Or wave to drown. But I have done with words,
And I would have you look into my face
And know that it is fearless.
Forgael. Do what you will,
For neither I nor you can break a mesh
Of the great golden net that is about us.
Dectora. There's nothing in the world that's worth a fear.
[*She passes* FORGAEL *and stands for a moment looking into his face.*
I have good reason for that thought.
[*She runs suddenly on to the raised part of the poop.*
And now
I can put fear away as a queen should.
[*She mounts on to the bulwark, and turns towards* FORGAEL.
Fool, fool! Although you have looked into my face
You do not see my purpose. I shall have gone
Before a hand can touch me.
Forgael. [*Folding his arms.*] My hands are still;
The ever-living hold us. Do what you will,
You cannot leap out of the golden net.
First Sailor. No need to drown, for, if you will pardon us
And measure out a course and bring us home,
We'll put this man to death.
Dectora. I promise it.
First Sailor. There is none to take his side.
Aibric. I am on his side.

I'll strike a blow for him to give him time
To cast his dreams away.

[AIBRIC *goes in front of* FORGAEL *with drawn sword.* FORGAEL *takes the harp.*

First Sailor. No other'll do it.

[*The* SAILORS *throw* AIBRIC *on one side. He falls upon the deck towards the poop. They lift their swords to strike* FORGAEL, *who is about to play the harp. The stage begins to darken. The* SAILORS *hesitate in fear.*

Second Sailor. He has put a sudden darkness over the moon.

Dectora. Nine swords with handles of rhinoceros horn
To him that strikes him first!

First Sailor. I will strike him first.

[*He goes close up to* FORGAEL *with his sword lifted. The harp begins to give out a faint light. The scene has become so dark that the only light is from the harp.*

[*Shrinking back.*] He has caught the crescent moon out of the sky,
And carries it between us.

Second Sailor. Holy fire
Has come into the jewels of the harp
To burn us to the marrow if we strike.

Dectora. I'll give a golden galley full of fruit,
That has the heady flavour of new wine,
To him that wounds him to the death.

First Sailor. I'll do it.
For all his spells will vanish when he dies,
Having their life in him.

Second Sailor. Though it be the moon
That he is holding up between us there,
I will strike at him.

The Others. And I! And I! And I!

[*Forgael plays the harp.*

First Sailor. [*Falling into a dream suddenly.*] But you were saying there is somebody
Upon that other ship we are to wake.
You did not know what brought him to his end,
But it was sudden.

Second Sailor. You are in the right;
I had forgotten that we must go wake him.

Dectora. He has flung a Druid spell upon the air,
And set you dreaming.

Second Sailor. How can we have a wake
When we have neither brown nor yellow ale?

First Sailor. I saw a flagon of brown ale aboard her.

Third Sailor. How can we raise the keen that do not know
What name to call him by?

First Sailor. Come to his ship.
His name will come into our thoughts in a minute.
I know that he died a thousand years ago,
And has not yet been waked.

Second Sailor. [*Beginning to keen.*] Ohone! O! O! O!
The yew bough has been broken into two,
And all the birds are scattered.

All the Sailors. O! O! O! O!

[*They go out keening.*

Dectora. Protect me now, gods, that my people swear by.

[AIBRIC *has risen from the ground where he had fallen. He has begun looking for his sword as if in a dream.*

Aibric. Where is my sword that fell out of my hand
When I first heard the news? Ah, there it is!

[*He goes dreamily towards the sword, but* DECTORA *runs at it and takes it up before he can reach it.*

Aibric. [*Sleepily.*] Queen, give it me.
Dectora. No, I have need of it.
Aibric. Why do you need a sword? But you may keep it,
Now that he's dead I have no need of it,
For everything is gone.
A Sailor. [*Calling from the other ship.*]
Come hither, Aibric,
And tell me who it is that we are waking.
Aibric. [*Half to* DECTORA, *half to himself.*] What name had that dead king? Arthur of Britain?
No, no—not Arthur. I remember now.
It was golden-armed Iollan, and he died
Broken-hearted, having lost his queen
Through wicked spells. That is not all the tale,
For he was killed. O! O! O! O! O! O!
For golden-armed Iollan has been killed. [*He goes out.*
[*While he has been speaking, and through part of what follows, one hears the wailing of the* SAILORS *from the other ship.* DECTORA *stands with the sword lifted in front of* FORGAEL.
Dectora. I will end all your magic on the instant.
[*Her voice becomes dreamy, and she lowers the sword slowly, and finally lets it fall. She spreads out her hair. She takes off her crown and lays it upon the deck.*
This sword is to lie beside him in the grave.
It was in all his battles. I will spread my hair,
And wring my hands, and wail him bitterly,
For I have heard that he was proud and laughing,
Blue-eyed, and a quick runner on bare feet,
And that he died a thousand years ago.
O! O! O! [FORGAEL *changes the tune.*
But no, that is not it.

I knew him well, and while I heard him laughing
They killed him at my feet. O! O! O! O!
For golden-armed Iollan that I loved.
But what is it that made me say I loved him?
It was that harper put it in my thoughts,
But it is true. Why did they run upon him,
And beat the golden helmet with their swords?

Forgael. Do you not know me, lady? I am he
That you are weeping for.

Dectora. No, for he is dead.
O! O! O! for golden-armed Iollan.

Forgael. It was so given out, but I will prove
That the grave-diggers in a dreamy frenzy
Have buried nothing but my golden arms.
Listen to that low-laughing string of the moon
And you will recollect my face and voice,
For you have listened to me playing it
These thousand years.

[*He starts up, listening to the birds. The harp slips from his hands, and remains leaning against the bulwarks behind him. The light goes out of it.*

What are the birds at there?
Why are they all a-flutter of a sudden?
What are you calling out above the mast?
If railing and reproach and mockery
Because I have awakened her to love
My magic strings, I'll make this answer to it:
Being driven on by voices and by dreams
That were clear messages from the ever-living,
I have done right. What could I but obey?
And yet you make a clamour of reproach.

Dectora. [*Laughing.*] Why, it's a wonder out of reckoning

That I should keen him from the full of the moon
To the horn, and he be hale and hearty.
Forgael. How have I wronged her now that she is merry?
But no, no, no! your cry is not against me.
You know the councils of the ever-living,
And all that tossing of your wings is joy,
And all that murmuring 's but a marriage song;
But if it be reproach, I answer this:
There is not one among you that made love
By any other means. You call it passion,
Consideration, generosity;
But it was all deceit, and flattery
To win a woman in her own despite,
For love is war, and there is hatred in it;
And if you say that she came willingly—
Dectora. Why do you turn away and hide your face,
That I would look upon for ever?
Forgael. My grief.
Dectora. Have I not loved you for a thousand years?
Forgael. I never have been golden-armed Iollan.
Dectora. I do not understand. I know your face
Better than my own hands.
Forgael. I have deceived you
Out of all reckoning.
Dectora. Is it not true
That you were born a thousand years ago,
In islands where the children of Aengus wind
In happy dances under a windy moon,
And that you'll bring me there?
Forgael. I have deceived you;
I have deceived you utterly.
Dectora. How can that be?

Is it that though your eyes are full of love
Some other woman has a claim on you,
And I've but half?
Forgael. Oh, no!
Dectora. And if there is,
If there be half a hundred more, what matter?
I'll never give another thought to it;
No, no, nor half a thought; but do not speak.
Women are hard and proud and stubborn-hearted,
Their heads being turned with praise and flattery;
And that is why their lovers are afraid
To tell them a plain story.
Forgael. That 's not the story;
But I have done so great a wrong against you,
There is no measure that it would not burst.
I will confess it all.
Dectora. What do I care,
Now that my body has begun to dream,
And you have grown to be a burning sod
In the imagination and intellect?
If something that 's most fabulous were true—
If you had taken me by magic spells,
And killed a lover or husband at my feet—
I would not let you speak, for I would know
That it was yesterday and not to-day
I loved him; I would cover up my ears,
As I am doing now. [*A pause.*] Why do you weep?
Forgael. I weep because I've nothing for your eyes
But desolate waters and a battered ship.
Dectora. Oh, why do you not lift your eyes to mine?
Forgael. I weep—I weep because bare night 's above,
And not a roof of ivory and gold.
Dectora. I would grow jealous of the ivory roof,

And strike the golden pillars with my hands.
I would that there was nothing in the world
But my beloved—that night and day had perished,
And all that is and all that is to be,
All that is not the meeting of our lips.
Forgael. I too, I too. Why do you look away?
Am I to fear the waves, or is the moon
My enemy?
Dectora. I looked upon the moon,
Longing to knead and pull it into shape
That I might lay it on your head as a crown.
But now it is your thoughts that wander away,
For you are looking at the sea. Do you not know
How great a wrong it is to let one's thought
Wander a moment when one is in love?
[*He has moved away. She follows him. He is looking out over the sea, shading his eyes.*
Why are you looking at the sea?
Forgael. Look there!
Dectora. What is there but a troop of ash-grey birds
That fly into the west?
Forgael. But listen, listen!
Dectora. What is there but the crying of the birds?
Forgael. If you'll but listen closely to that crying
You'll hear them calling out to one another
With human voices.
Dectora. Oh, I can hear them now
What are they? Unto what country do they fly?
Forgael. To unimaginable happiness.
They have been circling over our heads in the air,
But now that they have taken to the road
We have to follow, for they are our pilots;
And though they're but the colour of grey ash,

They're crying out, could you but hear their words,
'There is a country at the end of the world
Where no child's born but to outlive the moon.'

[*The* SAILORS *come in with* AIBRIC. *They are in great excitement.*

First Sailor. The hold is full of treasure.

Second Sailor. Full to the hatches.

First Sailor. Treasure and treasure.

Third Sailor. Boxes of precious spice.

First Sailor. Ivory images with amethyst eyes.

Third Sailor. Dragons with eyes of ruby.

First Sailor. The whole ship
Flashes as if it were a net of herrings.

Third Sailor. Let's home; I'd give some rubies to a woman.

Second Sailor. There's somebody I'd give the amethyst eyes to.

First Sailor. Let's home and spend it in our villages.

Aibric. [*Silencing them with a gesture.*] We would return to our own country, Forgael,
For we have found a treasure that's so great
Imagination cannot reckon it.
And having lit upon this woman there,
What more have you to look for on the seas?

Forgael. I cannot—I am going on to the end.
As for this woman, I think she is coming with me.

Aibric. The ever-living have made you mad; but no,
It was this woman in her woman's vengeance
That drove you to it, and I fool enough
To fancy that she'd bring you home again.
'Twas you that egged him to it, for you know
That he is being driven to his death.

Dectora. That is not true, for he has promised me

An unimaginable happiness.
Aibric. And if that happiness be more than dreams,
More than the froth, the feather, the dustwhirl,
The crazy nothing that I think it is,
It shall be in the country of the dead.
If there be such a country.
Dectora. No, not there,
But in some island where the life of the world
Leaps upward, as if all the streams o' the world
Had run into one fountain.
Aibric. Speak to him.
He knows that he is taking you to death;
Speak—he will not deny it.
Dectora. Is that true?
Forgael. I do not know for certain, but I know
That I have the best of pilots.
Aibric. Shadows, illusions,
That the shape-changers, the ever-laughing ones,
The immortal mockers have cast into his mind,
Or called before his eyes.
Dectora. Oh carry me
To some sure country, some familiar place.
Have we not everything that life can give
In having one another?
Forgael. How could I rest
If I refused the messengers and pilots
With all those sights and all that crying out?
Dectora. But I will cover up your eyes and ears,
That you may never hear the cry of the birds,
Or look upon them.
Forgael. Were they but lowlier
I'd do your will, but they are too high—too high.
Dectora. Being too high, their heady prophecies

But harry us with hopes that come to nothing,
Because we are not proud, imperishable,
Alone and winged.
Forgael. Our love shall be like theirs
When we have put their changeless image on.
Dectora. I am a woman, I die at every breath.
Aibric. Let the birds scatter, for the tree is broken,
And there's no help in words.
[*To the* SAILORS.] To the other ship,
And I will follow you and cut the rope
When I have said farewell to this man here,
For neither I nor any living man
Will look upon his face again. [*The* SAILORS *go out.*
Forgael. [*To* DECTORA.] Go with him,
For he will shelter you and bring you home.
Aibric. [*Taking* FORGAEL'S *hand.*] I'll do it for his sake.
Dectora. No. Take this sword
And cut the rope, for I go on with Forgael.
Aibric. [*Half falling into the keen.*] The yew bough has been broken into two,
And all the birds are scattered—O! O! O!
Farewell! farewell! [*He goes out.*
Dectora. The sword is in the rope—
The rope 's in two—it falls into the sea,
It whirls into the foam. O ancient worm,
Dragon that loved the world and held us to it,
You are broken, you are broken. The world drifts away,
And I am left alone with my beloved,
Who cannot put me from his sight for ever.
We are alone for ever, and I laugh,
Forgael, because you cannot put me from you.
The mist has covered the heavens, and you and I

Shall be alone for ever. We two—this crown—
I half remember. It has been in my dreams.
Bend lower, O king, that I may crown you with it.
O flower of the branch, O bird among the leaves,
O silver fish that my two hands have taken
Out of the running stream, O morning star,
Trembling in the blue heavens like a white fawn
Upon the misty border of the wood,
Bend lower, that I may cover you with my hair,
For we will gaze upon this world no longer.

[*The scene darkens, and the harp once more begins to burn as with a faint fire.* FORGAEL *is kneeling at* DECTORA'S *feet.*

Forgael. [*Gathering* DECTORA'S *hair about him.*]
Beloved, having dragged the net about us,
And knitted mesh to mesh, we grow immortal;
And that old harp awakens of itself
To cry aloud to the grey birds, and dreams,
That have had dreams for father, live in us.

THE HOUR-GLASS:

A MORALITY

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

A Wise Man
A Fool
Some Pupils
An Angel
The Wise Man's Wife and two Children

THE HOUR-GLASS:

A MORALITY.

SCENE: *A large room with a door at the back and another at the side opening to an inner room. A desk and a chair in the middle. An hour-glass on a bracket near the door. A creepy stool near it. Some benches. An astronomical globe. A blackboard. A large ancient map of the world on the wall. Some musical instruments. Floor strewed with rushes. A* WISE MAN *sitting at his desk.*

Wise Man. [*Turning over the pages of a book.*] Where is that passage I am to explain to my pupils to-day? Here it is, and the book says that it was written by a beggar on the walls of Babylon: 'There are two living countries, the one visible and the one invisible; and when it is winter with us it is summer in that country, and when the November winds are up among us it is lambing-time there.' I wish that my pupils had asked me to explain any other passage. [*The* FOOL *comes in and stands at the door holding out his hat. He has a pair of shears in the other hand.*] It sounds to me like foolishness; and yet that cannot be, for the writer of this book, where I have found so much knowledge, would not have set it by itself on this page, and surrounded it with so many images and so many deep colours and so much fine gilding, if it had been foolishness.

Fool. Give me a penny.

Wise Man. [*Turns to another page.*] Here he has written: 'The learned in old times forgot the visible country.' That I understand, but I have taught my learners better.

Fool. Won't you give me a penny?

Wise Man. What do you want? The words of the wise Saracen will not teach you much.

Fool. Such a great wise teacher as you are will not refuse a penny to a Fool.

Wise Man. What do you know about wisdom?

Fool. Oh, I know! I know what I have seen.

Wise Man. What is it you have seen?

Fool. When I went by Kilcluan where the bells used to be ringing at the break of every day, I could hear nothing but the people snoring in their houses. When I went by Tubbervanach where the young men used to be climbing the hill to the blessed well, they were sitting at the cross-roads playing cards. When I went by Carrigoras, where the friars used to be fasting and serving the poor, I saw them drinking wine and obeying their wives. And when I asked what misfortune had brought all these changes, they said it was no misfortune, but it was the wisdom they had learned from your teaching.

Wise Man. Run round to the kitchen, and my wife will give you something to eat.

Fool. That is foolish advice for a wise man to give.

Wise Man. Why, Fool?

Fool. What is eaten is gone. I want pennies for my bag. I must buy bacon in the shops, and nuts in the market, and strong drink for the time when the sun is weak. And I want snares to catch the rabbits and the

squirrels and the hares, and a pot to cook them in.

Wise Man. Go away. I have other things to think of now than giving you pennies.

Fool. Give me a penny and I will bring you luck. Bresal the Fisherman lets me sleep among the nets in his loft in the winter-time because he says I bring him luck; and in the summer-time the wild creatures let me sleep near their nests and their holes. It is lucky even to look at me or to touch me, but it is much more lucky to give me a penny. [*Holds out his hand.*] If I wasn't lucky, I'd starve.

Wise Man. What have you got the shears for?

Fool. I won't tell you. If I told you, you would drive them away.

Wise Man. Whom would I drive away?

Fool. I won't tell you.

Wise Man. Not if I give you a penny?

Fool. No.

Wise Man. Not if I give you two pennies?

Fool. You will be very lucky if you give me two pennies, but I won't tell you!

Wise Man. Three pennies?

Fool. Four, and I will tell you!

Wise Man. Very well, four. But I will not call you Teigue the Fool any longer.

Fool. Let me come close to you where nobody will hear me. But first you must promise you will not drive them away. [Wise Man *nods.*] Every day men go out dressed in black and spread great black nets over the hills, great black nets.

Wise Man. Why do they do that?

Fool. That they may catch the feet of the angels. But every morning, just before the dawn, I go out and

cut the nets with my shears, and the angels fly away.

Wise Man. Ah, now I know that you are Teigue the Fool. You have told me that I am wise, and I have never seen an angel.

Fool. I have seen plenty of angels.

Wise Man. Do you bring luck to the angels too?

Fool. Oh, no, no! No one could do that. But they are always there if one looks about one; they are like the blades of grass.

Wise Man. When do you see them?

Fool. When one gets quiet, then something wakes up inside one, something happy and quiet like the stars —not like the seven that move, but like the fixed stars. [*He points upward.*

Wise Man. And what happens then?

Fool. Then all in a minute one smells summer flowers, and tall people go by, happy and laughing, and their clothes are the colour of burning sods.

Wise Man. Is it long since you have seen them, Teigue the Fool?

Fool. Not long, glory be to God! I saw one coming behind me just now. It was not laughing, but it had clothes the colour of burning sods, and there was something shining about its head.

Wise Man. Well, there are your four pennies. You, a fool, say 'Glory be to God,' but before I came the wise men said it. Run away now. I must ring the bell for my scholars.

Fool. Four pennies! That means a great deal of luck. Great teacher, I have brought you plenty of luck! [*He goes out shaking the bag.*

Wise Man. Though they call him Teigue the Fool, he is not more foolish than everybody used to be, with

their dreams and their preachings and their three worlds; but I have overthrown their three worlds with the seven sciences. [*He touches the books with his hands.*] With Philosophy that was made for the lonely star, I have taught them to forget Theology; with Architecture, I have hidden the ramparts of their cloudy heaven; with Music, the fierce planets' daughter whose hair is always on fire, and with Grammar that is the moon's daughter, I have shut their ears to the imaginary harpings and speech of the angels; and I have made formations of battle with Arithmetic that have put the hosts of heaven to the rout. But, Rhetoric and Dialectic, that have been born out of the light star and out of the amorous star, you have been my spearman and my catapult! Oh! my swift horsemen! Oh! my keen darting arguments, it is because of you that I have overthrown the hosts of foolishness! [*An* ANGEL, *in a dress the colour of embers, and carrying a blossoming apple bough in her hand and a gilded halo about her head, stands upon the threshold.*] Before I came, men's minds were stuffed with folly about a heaven where birds sang the hours, and about angels that came and stood upon men's thresholds. But I have locked the visions into heaven and turned the key upon them. Well, I must consider this passage about the two countries. My mother used to say something of the kind. She would say that when our bodies sleep our souls awake, and that whatever withers here ripens yonder, and that harvests are snatched from us that they may feed invisible people. But the meaning of the book may be different, for only fools and women have thoughts like that; their thoughts were never written upon the walls of Babylon. [*He sees the* ANGEL.] What are you? Who are you? I think I saw some that

were like you in my dreams when I was a child—that bright thing, that dress that is the colour of embers! But I have done with dreams, I have done with dreams.

Angel. I am the Angel of the Most High God.

Wise Man. Why have you come to me?

Angel. I have brought you a message.

Wise Man. What message have you got for me?

Angel. You will die within the hour. You will die when the last grains have fallen in this glass.

[*She turns the hour-glass.*

Wise Man. My time to die has not come. I have my pupils. I have a young wife and children that I cannot leave. Why must I die?

Angel. You must die because no souls have passed over the threshold of Heaven since you came into this country. The threshold is grassy, and the gates are rusty, and the angels that keep watch there are lonely.

Wise Man. Where will death bring me to?

Angel. The doors of Heaven will not open to you, for you have denied the existence of Heaven; and the doors of Purgatory will not open to you, for you have denied the existence of Purgatory.

Wise Man. But I have also denied the existence of Hell!

Angel. Hell is the place of those who deny.

Wise Man. [*Kneels.*] I have, indeed, denied everything, and have taught others to deny. I have believed in nothing but what my senses told me. But, oh! beautiful angel, forgive me, forgive me!

Angel. You should have asked forgiveness long ago.

Wise Man. Had I seen your face as I see it now, oh! beautiful angel, I would have believed, I would have asked forgiveness. Maybe you do not know how easy

it is to doubt. Storm, death, the grass rotting, many sicknesses, those are the messengers that came to me. Oh! why are you silent? You carry the pardon of the Most High; give it to me! I would kiss your hands if I were not afraid—no, no, the hem of your dress!

Angel. You let go undying hands too long ago to take hold of them now.

Wise Man. You cannot understand. You live in a country that we can only dream about. Maybe it is as hard for you to understand why we disbelieve as it is for us to believe. Oh! what have I said! You know everything! Give me time to undo what I have done. Give me a year—a month—a day—an hour! Give me to this hour's end, that I may undo what I have done!

Angel. You cannot undo what you have done. Yet I have this power with my message. If you can find one that believes before the hour's end, you shall come to Heaven after the years of Purgatory. For, from one fiery seed, watched over by those that sent me, the harvest can come again to heap the golden threshing floor. But now farewell, for I am weary with the weight of time.

Wise Man. Blessed be the Father, blessed be the Son, blessed be the Spirit, blessed be the Messenger They have sent!

Angel. [*At the door, and pointing at the hour-glass.*] In a little while the uppermost glass will be empty.

[*Goes out.*

Wise Man. Everything will be well with me. I will call my pupils; they only say they doubt. [*Pulls the bell.*] They will be here in a moment. I hear their feet outside on the path. They want to please me; they pretend that they disbelieve. Belief is too old to be overcome all in a minute. Besides I can prove what I

once disproved. [*Another pull at the bell.*] They are coming now. I will go to my desk. I will speak quietly, as if nothing had happened.

[*He stands at the desk with a fixed look in his eyes.*

Enter PUPILS *and the* FOOL.

Fool. Leave me alone. Leave me alone. Who is that pulling at my bag? King's son, do not pull at my bag.

A Young Man. Did your friends the angels give you that bag? Why don't they fill your bag for you?

Fool. Give me pennies! Give me some pennies!

A Young Man. What do you want pennies for, that great bag at your waist is heavy?

Fool. I want to buy bacon in the shops, and nuts in the market, and strong drink for the time when the sun is weak, and snares to catch rabbits and the squirrels that steal the nuts, and hares, and a great pot to cook them in.

A Young Man. Why don't your friends tell you where buried treasures are?

Another. Why don't they make you dream about treasures? If one dreams three times there is always treasure.

Fool. [*Holding out his hat.*] Give me pennies! Give me pennies!

[*They throw pennies into his hat. He is standing close to the door, that he may hold out his hat to each newcomer.*

A Young Man. Master, will you have Teigue the Fool for a scholar?

Another Young Man. Teigue, will you give us your pennies if we teach you lessons? No, he goes to school

for nothing on the mountains. Tell us what you learn on the mountains, Teigue?

Wise Man. Be silent all! [*He has been standing silent, looking away.*] Stand still in your places, for there is something I would have you tell me.

[*A moment's pause. They all stand round in their places.* TEIGUE *still stands at the door.*

Wise Man. Is there any one amongst you who believes in God? In Heaven? Or in Purgatory? Or in Hell?

All the Young Men. No one, Master! No one!

Wise Man. I knew you would all say that; but do not be afraid. I will not be angry. Tell me the truth. Do you not believe?

A Young Man. We once did, but you have taught us to know better.

Wise Man. Oh! teaching, teaching does not go very deep! The heart remains unchanged under it all. You have the faith that you always had, and you are afraid to tell me.

A Young Man. No, no, Master!

Wise Man. If you tell me that you have not changed I shall be glad and not angry.

A Young Man. [*To his* Neighbour.] He wants somebody to dispute with.

His Neighbour. I knew that from the beginning.

A Young Man. That is not the subject for to-day; you were going to talk about the words the beggar wrote upon the walls of Babylon.

Wise Man. If there is one amongst you that has not changed, he will be my best friend. Surely there is one amongst you. [*They are all silent.*] Surely what you learned at your mother's knees has not been so soon forgotten.

A Young Man. Master, till you came, no teacher in this land was able to get rid of foolishness and ignorance. But every one has listened to you, every one has learned the truth. You have had your last disputation.

Another. What a fool you made of that monk in the market-place! He had not a word to say.

Wise Man. [*Comes from his desk and stands among them in the middle of the room.*] Pupils, dear friends, I have deceived you all this time. It was I myself who was ignorant. There is a God. There is a Heaven. There is fire that passes and there is fire that lasts for ever.

[TEIGUE, *through all this, is sitting on a stool by the door, reckoning on his fingers what he will buy with his money.*

A Young Man. [*To* Another.] He will not be satisfied till we dispute with him. [*To the* WISE MAN.] Prove it, Master. Have you seen them?

Wise Man. [*In a low, solemn voice.*] Just now, before you came in, someone came to the door, and when I looked up I saw an angel standing there.

A Young Man. You were in a dream. Anybody can see an angel in his dreams.

Wise Man. Oh, my God! It was not a dream! I was awake, waking as I am now. I tell you I was awake as I am now.

A Young Man. Some dream when they are awake, but they are the crazy, and who would believe what they say? Forgive me, Master, but that is what you taught me to say. That is what you said to the monk when he spoke of the visions of the saints and the martyrs.

Another Young Man. You see how well we remember your teaching.

Wise Man. Out, out from my sight! I want somebody

who has not changed. That is the grain the angel spoke of—I must find it before I die. I tell you I must find it. The sands are falling there and you answer me with arguments. Out with you, out of my sight!

[*The* YOUNG MEN *laugh.*

A Young Man. How well he plays at faith! He is like the monk when he had nothing more to say.

Wise Man. Out, out, this is no time for laughter! Out with you, though you are a king's son!

[*They begin to hurry out.*

A Young Man. Come, come; he wants us to find someone who will dispute with him. [*All go out.*

Wise Man. [*Alone; he goes to the door at the side.*] I will call my wife. She will believe; women always believe. [*He opens the door and calls.*] Bridget! Bridget! [BRIDGET *comes in wearing her apron, her sleeves turned up from her floury arms.*] Bridget, tell me the truth; do not say what you think will please me. Do you sometimes say your prayers?

Bridget. Prayers! No, you taught me to leave them off long ago. At first I was sorry, but I am glad now for I am sleepy in the evenings.

Wise Man. But do you not believe in God?

Bridget. Oh, a good wife only believes what her husband tells her!

Wise Man. But sometimes when you are alone, when I am in the school and the children asleep, do you not think about the saints, about the things you used to believe in? What do you think of when you are alone?

Bridget. [*Considering.*] I think about nothing. Sometimes I wonder if the linen is bleaching white, or I go out to see if the crows are picking up the chickens' food.

Wise Man. Oh, what can I do! Is there nobody who

believes he can never die? I must go and find somebody! [*He goes towards the door, but stops with his eyes fixed on the hour-glass.*] I cannot go out; I cannot leave that. Go and call my pupils again. I will make them understand. I will say to them that only amid spiritual terror or only when all that laid hold on life is shaken can we see truth. There is something in Plato, but—No, do not call them. They would answer as I have bid.

Bridget. You want somebody to get up an argument with.

Wise Man. Oh, look out of the door and tell me if there is anybody there in the street. I cannot leave this glass; somebody might shake it! Then the sand would fall more quickly.

Bridget. I don't understand what you are saying. [*Looks out.*] There is a great crowd of people talking to your pupils.

Wise Man. Oh, run out, Bridget, and see if they have found somebody that, all the time I was teaching, understood nothing or did not listen!

Bridget. [*Wiping her arms in her apron and pulling down her sleeves.*] It's a hard thing to be married to a man of learning that must be always having arguments. [*Goes out and shouts through the kitchen door.*] Don't be meddling with the bread, children, while I'm out.

Wise Man. [*Kneels down.*] '*Confiteor Deo Omnipotenti, beatæ Mariæ—salvum—salvum . . .*' I have forgotten it all. It is thirty years since I have said a prayer. I must pray in the common tongue, like a clown begging in the market, like Teigue the Fool! [*He prays.*] Help me, Father, Son and Spirit!

[BRIDGET *enters, followed by the* FOOL, *who is holding out his hat to her.*

Fool. Give me something; give me a penny to buy bacon in the shops, and nuts in the market, and strong drink for the time when the sun grows weak.

Bridget. I have no pennies. [*To the* WISE MAN.] Your pupils cannot find anybody to argue with you. There is nobody in the whole country who has enough belief to fill a pipe with since you put down the monk. Can't you be quiet now and not always wanting to have arguments? It must be terrible to have a mind like that.

Wise Man. I am lost! I am lost!

Bridget. Leave me alone now; I have to make the bread for you and the children.

Wise Man. Out of this, woman, out of this, I say! [BRIDGET *goes through the kitchen door.*] Will nobody find a way to help me! But she spoke of my children. I had forgotten them. They will not have changed. It is only those who have reason that doubt; the young are full of faith. Bridget, Bridget, send my children to me.

Bridget. [*Inside.*] Your father wants you; run to him now.

[*The two* CHILDREN *come in. They stand together a little way from the threshold of the kitchen door, looking timidly at their father.*

Wise Man. Children, what do you believe? Is there a Heaven? Is there a Hell? Is there a Purgatory?

First Child. We haven't forgotten, father.

The Other Child. Oh no, father. [*They both speak together as if in school.*] There is nothing we cannot see; there is nothing we cannot touch.

First Child. Foolish people used to think that there was, but you are very learned and you have taught us better.

Wise Man. You are just as bad as the others, just as bad as the others! Do not run away! Come back to me! [*The* CHILDREN *begin to cry and run away.*] Why are you afraid? I will teach you better—no, I will never teach you again. Go to your mother! no, she will not be able to teach them . . . Help them, O God! . . . The grains are going very quickly. There is very little sand in the uppermost glass. Somebody will come for me in a moment; perhaps he is at the door now! All creatures that have reason doubt. Oh that the grass and the plants could speak! Somebody has said that they would wither if they doubted. Oh speak to me, O grass blades! O fingers of God's certainty, speak to me! You are millions and you will not speak. I dare not know the moment the messenger will come for me. I will cover the glass. [*He covers it with a cloth. Sees the* FOOL, *who is sitting by the door playing with some flowers which he has stuck in his hat. He has begun to blow a dandelion-head.*] What are you doing?

Fool. Wait a moment. [*He blows.*] Four, five, six.

Wise Man. What are you doing that for?

Fool. I am blowing at the dandelion to find out what time it is.

Wise Man. You have heard everything! That is why you want to find out what hour it is! You are waiting to see them coming through the door to carry me away. [FOOL *goes on blowing.*] I will not have you sitting there. I will have no one here when they come. [*He seizes the* FOOL *by the shoulders, and begins to force him out through the door, then suddenly changes his mind.*] No, I have something to ask you. [*He drags him back into the room.*] Is there a Heaven? Is there a Hell? Is there a Purgatory?

Fool. So you ask me now. I thought when you were

asking your pupils, I said to myself, if he would ask Teigue the Fool, Teigue could tell him all about it, for Teigue has learned all about it when he has been cutting the nets.

Wise Man. Tell me quickly!

Fool. I said, Teigue knows everything. Not even the cats or the hares that milk the cows have Teigue's wisdom. But Teigue will not speak; he says nothing.

Wise Man. Tell me, tell me! For under the cover the grains are falling, and when they are all fallen I shall die; and my soul will be lost if I have not found somebody that knows and believes! Speak, speak!

Fool. [*Looking wise.*] I will not speak! I will not tell you what is in my mind, and I won't tell you what is in my bag. You might steal away my thoughts. I met a bodach on the road yesterday, and he said, 'Teigue, tell me how many pennies are in your bag; I will wager three pennies that there are not twenty pennies in your bag; let me put in my hand and count them.' But I pulled the strings tighter, like this; and when I go to sleep every night I hide the bag where no one knows.

Wise Man. [*Goes towards the hour-glass as if to uncover it.*] No, no, I have not the courage. [*He kneels.*] Have pity upon me, Fool, and tell me!

Fool. Ah! Now, that is different. I am not afraid of you now. But I must come nearer to you; somebody in there might hear what the angel said.

Wise Man. Oh, what did the angel tell you?

Fool. Once I was alone on the hills, and an angel come by and he said, 'Teigue the Fool, do not forget the Three Fires; the Fire that punishes, the Fire that purifies, and the Fire wherein the soul rejoices for ever!'

Wise Man. He believes! I am saved! Help me!

The sand has run out. I am dying. . . . [FOOL *helps him to his chair.*] I am going from the country of the seven wandering stars, and I am going to the country of the fixed stars! I understand it all now. One sinks in on God; we do not see the truth; God sees the truth in us. Ring the bell. They are coming. Tell them, Fool, that when the life and the mind are broken the truth comes through them like peas through a broken peascod. Pray, Fool, that they may be given a sign and carry their souls alive out of the dying world. Your prayers are better than mine.

[FOOL *bows his head.* WISE MAN'S *head sinks on his arm on the books.* PUPILS *enter.*

A Young Man. Look at the Fool turned bell-ringer!

Another. What have you called us in for, Teigue? What are you going to tell us?

Another. No wonder he has had dreams! See, he is fast asleep now. [*Goes over and touches him.*] He is so fast asleep I cannot wake him. Oh, he is dead!

Fool. Do not stir! He asked for a sign that you might be saved. [*All are silent for a moment.*] . . . Look what has come from his mouth . . . a little winged thing . . . a little shining thing. . . . It is gone to the door. [*The* ANGEL *appears in the doorway, stretches out her hands and closes them again.*] The angel has taken it in her hands. . . . She will open her hands in the Garden of Paradise. [*They all kneel.*

CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

PETER GILLANE
MICHAEL GILLANE, *his Son, going to be married*
PATRICK GILLANE, *a lad of twelve, Michael's Brother*
BRIDGET GILLANE, *Peter's Wife*
DELIA CAHEL, *engaged to Michael*
THE POOR OLD WOMAN
Neighbours

CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN.

SCENE: *Interior of a cottage close to Killala, in* 1798. BRIDGET *is standing at a table undoing a parcel.* PETER *is sitting at one side of the fire,* PATRICK *at the other.*

Peter. What is that sound I hear?

Patrick. I don't hear anything. [*He listens.*] I hear it now. It's like cheering. [*He goes to the window and looks out.*] I wonder what they are cheering about. I don't see anybody.

Peter. It might be a hurling.

Patrick. There's no hurling to-day. It must be down in the town the cheering is.

Bridget. I suppose the boys must be having some sport of their own. Come over here, Peter, and look at Michael's wedding-clothes.

Peter. [*Shifts his chair to table.*] Those are grand clothes, indeed.

Bridget. You hadn't clothes like that when you married me, and no coat to put on of a Sunday more than any other day.

Peter. That is true, indeed. We never thought a son of our own would be wearing a suit of that sort for his wedding, or have so good a place to bring a wife to.

Patrick. [*Who is still at the window.*] There's an old woman coming down the road. I don't know is it here she is coming?

Bridget. It will be a neighbour coming to hear about Michael's wedding. Can you see who it is?

Patrick. I think it is a stranger, but she's not coming to the house. She's turned into the gap that goes down where Murteen and his sons are shearing sheep. [*He turns towards* BRIDGET.] Do you remember what Winny of the Cross Roads was saying the other night about the strange woman that goes through the country whatever time there's war or trouble coming?

Bridget. Don't be bothering us about Winny's talk, but go and open the door for your brother. I hear him coming up the path.

Peter. I hope he has brought Delia's fortune with him safe, for fear her people might go back on the bargain and I after making it. Trouble enough I had making it.

[PATRICK *opens the door and* MICHAEL *comes in.*

Bridget. What kept you, Michael? We were looking out for you this long time.

Michael. I went round by the priest's house to bid him be ready to marry us to-morrow.

Bridget. Did he say anything?

Michael. He said it was a very nice match, and that he was never better pleased to marry any two in his parish than myself and Delia Cahel.

Peter. Have you got the fortune, Michael?

Michael. Here it is.

[MICHAEL *puts bag on table and goes over and leans against chimney-jamb.* BRIDGET, *who has been all this time examining the clothes, pulling the seams and trying the lining of the pockets, etc., puts the clothes on the dresser.*

Peter. [*Getting up and taking the bag in his hand and*

turning out the money.] Yes, I made the bargain well for you, Michael. Old John Cahel would sooner have kept a share of this a while longer. 'Let me keep the half of it until the first boy is born,' says he. 'You will not,' says I. 'Whether there is or is not a boy, the whole hundred pounds must be in Michael's hands before he brings your daughter to the house.' The wife spoke to him then, and he gave in at the end.

Bridget. You seem well pleased to be handling the money, Peter.

Peter. Indeed, I wish I had had the luck to get a hundred pounds, or twenty pounds itself, with the wife I married.

Bridget. Well, if I didn't bring much I didn't get much. What had you the day I married you but a flock of hens and you feeding them, and a few lambs and you driving them to the market at Ballina. [*She is vexed and bangs a jug on the dresser.*] If I brought no fortune I worked it out in my bones, laying down the baby, Michael that is standing there now, on a stook of straw, while I dug the potatoes, and never asking big dresses or anything but to be working.

Peter. That is true, indeed. [*He pats her arm.*

Bridget. Leave me alone now till I ready the house for the woman that is to come into it.

Peter. You are the best woman in Ireland, but money is good, too. [*He begins handling the money again and sits down.*] I never thought to see so much money within my four walls. We can do great things now we have it. We can take the ten acres of land we have a chance of since Jamsie Dempsey died, and stock it. We will go to the fair of Ballina to buy the stock. Did Delia ask any of the money for her own use, Michael?

Michael. She did not, indeed. She did not seem to take much notice of it, or to look at it at all.

Bridget. That 's no wonder. Why would she look at it when she had yourself to look at, a fine, strong young man? it is proud she must be to get you; a good steady boy that will make use of the money, and not be running through it or spending it on drink like another.

Peter. It's likely Michael himself was not thinking much of the fortune either, but of what sort the girl was to look at.

Michael. [*Coming over towards the table.*] Well, you would like a nice comely girl to be beside you, and to go walking with you. The fortune only lasts for a while, but the woman will be there always.

Patrick. [*Turning round from the window.*] They are cheering again down in the town. Maybe they are landing horses from Enniscrone. They do be cheering when the horses take the water well.

Michael. There are no horses in it. Where would they be going and no fair at hand? Go down to the town, Patrick, and see what is going on.

Patrick. [*Opens the door to go out, but stops for a moment on the threshold.*] Will Delia remember, do you think, to bring the greyhound pup she promised me when she would be coming to the house?

Michael. She will surely.

[PATRICK *goes out, leaving the door open.*

Peter. It will be Patrick's turn next to be looking for a fortune, but he won't find it so easy to get it and he with no place of his own.

Bridget. I do be thinking sometimes, now things are going so well with us, and the Cahels such a good back to us in the district, and Delia's own uncle a priest, we

might be put in the way of making Patrick a priest some day, and he so good at his books.

Peter. Time enough, time enough, you have always your head full of plans, Bridget.

Bridget. We will be well able to give him learning, and not to send him tramping the country like a poor scholar that lives on charity.

Michael. They're not done cheering yet.

[*He goes over to the door and stands there for a moment, putting up his hand to shade his eyes.*

Bridget. Do you see anything?

Michael. I see an old woman coming up the path.

Bridget. Who is it, I wonder? It must be the strange woman Patrick saw a while ago.

Michael. I don't think it's one of the neighbours anyway, but she has her cloak over her face.

Bridget. It might be some poor woman heard we were making ready for the wedding and came to look for her share.

Peter. I may as well put the money out of sight. There is no use leaving it out for every stranger to look at.

[*He goes over to a large box in the corner, opens it and puts the bag in and fumbles at the lock.*

Michael. There she is, father! [*An* OLD WOMAN *passes the window slowly, she looks at* MICHAEL *as she passes.*] I'd sooner a stranger not to come to the house the night before my wedding.

Bridget. Open the door, Michael; don't keep the poor woman waiting.

[*The* OLD WOMAN *comes in.* MICHAEL *stands aside to make way for her.*

Old Woman. God save all here!

Peter. God save you kindly!

Old Woman. You have good shelter here.

Peter. You are welcome to whatever shelter we have.

Bridget. Sit down there by the fire and welcome.

Old Woman. [*Warming her hands.*] There is a hard wind outside.

[MICHAEL *watches her curiously from the door.* PETER *comes over to the table.*

Peter. Have you travelled far to-day?

Old Woman. I have travelled far, very far; there are few have travelled so far as myself, and there's many a one that doesn't make me welcome. There was one that had strong sons I thought were friends of mine, but they were shearing their sheep, and they wouldn't listen to me.

Peter. It's a pity indeed for any person to have no place of their own.

Old Woman. That's true for you indeed, and it's long I'm on the roads since I first went wandering.

Bridget. It is a wonder you are not worn out with so much wandering.

Old Woman. Sometimes my feet are tired and my hands are quiet, but there is no quiet in my heart. When the people see me quiet, they think old age has come on me and that all the stir has gone out of me. But when the trouble is on me I must be talking to my friends.

Bridget. What was it put you wandering?

Old Woman. Too many strangers in the house.

Bridget. Indeed you look as if you'd had your share of trouble.

Old Woman. I have had trouble indeed.

Bridget. What was it put the trouble on you?

Old Woman. My land that was taken from me.

Peter. Was it much land they took from you?

Old Woman. My four beautiful green fields.

Peter. [*Aside to* BRIDGET.] Do you think could she be the widow Casey that was put out of her holding at Kilglass a while ago?

Bridget. She is not. I saw the widow Casey one time at the market in Ballina, a stout fresh woman.

Peter. [*To* OLD WOMAN.] Did you hear a noise of cheering, and you coming up the hill?

Old Woman. I thought I heard the noise I used to hear when my friends came to visit me.

[*She begins singing half to herself.*

I will go cry with the woman,
For yellow-haired Donough is dead,
With a hempen rope for a neckcloth,
And a white cloth on his head,——

Michael. [*Coming from the door.*] What is it that you are singing, ma'am?

Old Woman. Singing I am about a man I knew one time, yellow-haired Donough that was hanged in Galway.

[*She goes on singing, much louder.*

I am come to cry with you, woman,
My hair is unwound and unbound;
I remember him ploughing his field,
Turning up the red side of the ground,
And building his barn on the hill
With the good mortared stone;
Oh! we'd have pulled down the gallows
Had it happened in Enniscrone!

Michael. What was it brought him to his death?

Old Woman. He died for love of me: many a man has died for love of me.

Peter. [*Aside to* BRIDGET.] Her trouble has put her wits astray.

Michael. Is it long since that song was made? Is it long since he got his death?

Old Woman. Not long, not long. But there were others that died for love of me a long time ago.

Michael. Were they neighbours of your own, ma'am?

Old Woman. Come here beside me and I'll tell you about them. [MICHAEL *sits down beside her at the hearth.*] There was a red man of the O'Donells from the north, and a man of the O'Sullivans from the south, and there was one Brian that lost his life at Clontarf by the sea, and there were a great many in the west, some that died hundreds of years ago, and there are some that will die to-morrow.

Michael. Is it in the west that men will die to-morrow?

Old Woman. Come nearer, nearer to me.

Bridget. Is she right, do you think? Or is she a woman from beyond the world?

Peter. She doesn't know well what she's talking about, with the want and the trouble she has gone through.

Bridget. The poor thing, we should treat her well.

Peter. Give her a drink of milk and a bit of the oaten cake.

Bridget. Maybe we should give her something along with that, to bring her on her way. A few pence or a shilling itself, and we with so much money in the house.

Peter. Indeed I'd not begrudge it to her if we had it to spare, but if we go running through what we have, we'll soon have to break the hundred pounds, and that would be a pity.

Bridget. Shame on you, Peter. Give her the shilling and your blessing with it, or our own luck will go from us.

[PETER *goes to the box and takes out a shilling.*

Bridget. [*To the* OLD WOMAN.] Will you have a drink of milk, ma'am?

Old Woman. It is not food or drink that I want.

Peter. [*Offering the shilling.*] Here is something for you.

Old Woman. This is not what I want. It is not silver I want.

Peter. What is it you would be asking for?

Old Woman. If anyone would give me help he must give me himself, he must give me all.

[PETER *goes over to the table staring at the shilling in his hand in a bewildered way, and stands whispering to* BRIDGET.

Michael. Have you no one to care you in your age, ma'am?

Old Woman. I have not. With all the lovers that brought me their love, I never set out the bed for any.

Michael. Are you lonely going the roads, ma'am?

Old Woman. I have my thoughts and I have my hopes.

Michael. What hopes have you to hold to?

Old Woman. The hope of getting my beautiful fields back again; the hope of putting the strangers out of my house.

Michael. What way will you do that, ma'am?

Old Woman. I have good friends that will help me. They are gathering to help me now. I am not afraid. If they are put down to-day they will get the upper hand to-morrow. [*She gets up.*] I must be going to meet my friends. They are coming to help me and I must be there to welcome them. I must call the neighbours together to welcome them.

Michael. I will go with you.

Bridget. It is not her friends you have to go and welcome, Michael; it is the girl coming into the house you have to welcome. You have plenty to do, it is food and drink you have to bring to the house. The woman

that is coming home is not coming with empty hands; you would not have an empty house before her. [*To the* OLD WOMAN.] Maybe you don't know, ma'am, that my son is going to be married to-morrow.

Old Woman. It is not a man going to his marriage that I look to for help.

Peter. [*To* BRIDGET.] Who is she, do you think, at all?

Bridget. You did not tell us your name yet, ma'am.

Old Woman. Some call me the Poor Old Woman, and there are some that call me Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

Peter. I think I knew someone of that name, once. Who was it, I wonder? It must have been someone I knew when I was a boy. No, no; I remember, I heard it in a song.

Old Woman. [*Who is standing in the doorway.*] They are wondering that there were songs made for me; there have been many songs made for me. I heard one on the wind this morning.

[*Sings.*]

Do not make a great keening
When the graves have been dug to-morrow.
Do not call the white-scarfed riders
To the burying that shall be to-morrow.
Do not spread food to call strangers
To the wakes that shall be to-morrow;
Do not give money for prayers
For the dead that shall die to-morrow.

they will have no need of prayers, they will have no need of prayers.

Michael. I do not know what that song means, but tell me something I can do for you.

Peter. Come over to me, Michael.

Michael. Hush, father, listen to her.

Old Woman. It is a hard service they take that help me. Many that are red-cheeked now will be pale-cheeked; many that have been free to walk the hills and the bogs and the rushes, will be sent to walk hard streets in far countries; many a good plan will be broken; many that have gathered money will not stay to spend it; many a child will be born and there will be no father at its christening to give it a name. They that have red cheeks will have pale cheeks for my sake, and for all that, they will think they are well paid.

[*She goes out; her voice is heard outside singing.*

They shall be remembered for ever,
They shall be alive for ever,
They shall be speaking for ever,
The people shall hear them for ever.

Bridget. [*To* PETER.] Look at him, Peter; he has the look of a man that has got the touch. [*Raising her voice.*] Look here, Michael, at the wedding clothes. Such grand clothes as these are! You have a right to fit them on now, it would be a pity to-morrow if they did not fit. The boys would be laughing at you. Take them, Michael, and go into the room and fit them on.

[*She puts them on his arm.*

Michael. What wedding are you talking of? What clothes will I be wearing to-morrow?

Bridget. These are the clothes you are going to wear when you marry Delia Cahel to-morrow.

Michael. I had forgotten that.

[*He looks at the clothes and turns towards the inner room, but stops at the sound of cheering outside.*

Peter. There is the shouting come to our own door. What is it has happened?

[Neighbours *come crowding in*, PATRICK *and* DELIA *with them.*

Patrick. There are ships in the Bay; the French are landing at Killala!

[PETER *takes his pipe from his mouth and his hat off, and stands up. The clothes slip from* MICHAEL'S *arm.*

Delia. Michael! [*He takes no notice.*] Michael! [*He turns towards her.*] Why do you look at me like a stranger?

[*She drops his arm.* BRIDGET *goes over towards her.*

Patrick. The boys are all hurrying down the hillsides to join the French.

Delia. Michael won't be going to join the French.

Bridget. [*To* PETER.] Tell him not to go, Peter.

Peter. It's no use. He doesn't hear a word we're saying.

Bridget. Try and coax him over to the fire.

Delia. Michael, Michael! You won't leave me! You won't join the French, and we going to be married!

[*She puts her arms about him, he turns towards her as if about to yield.*

OLD WOMAN'S *voice outside.*

They shall be speaking for ever,
The people shall hear them for ever.

[MICHAEL *breaks away from* DELIA, *stands for a second at the door, then rushes out, following the* OLD WOMAN'S *voice.* BRIDGET *takes* DELIA, *who is crying silently, into her arms.*

Peter. [*To* PATRICK, *laying a hand on his arm.*] Did you see an old woman going down the path?

Patrick. I did not, but I saw a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen.

APPENDIX:

Acting Version of The Shadowy Waters

APPENDIX.

ACTING VERSION OF *THE SHADOWY WATERS.*

FORGAEL
AIBRIC
SAILORS
DECTORA

The scene is the same as in the text except that the sail is dull copper colour. The poop rises several feet above the stage, and from the overhanging stern hangs a lanthorn with a greenish light. The sea or sky is represented by a semicircular cloth of which nothing can be seen except a dark abyss, for the stage is lighted by arc-lights so placed upon a bridge over the proscenium as to throw a perpendicular light upon the stage. The light is dim, and there are deep shadows which waver as if with the passage of clouds over the moon. The persons are dressed in blue and green, and move but little. Some sailors are discovered crouching by the sail. Forgael is asleep and Aibric standing by the tiller on the raised poop.

First Sailor. It is long enough, and too long, Forgael has been bringing us through the waste places of the great sea.

Second Sailor. We did not meet with a ship to make a prey of these eight weeks, or any shore or island to plunder or to harry. It is a hard thing, age to be coming

on me, and I not to get the chance of doing a robbery that would enable me to live quiet and honest to the end of my lifetime.

First Sailor. We are out since the new moon. What is worse again, it is the way we are in a ship, the barrels empty and my throat shrivelled with drought, and nothing to quench it but water only.

Forgael. [*In his sleep.*] Yes; there, there; that hair that is the colour of burning.

First Sailor. Listen to him now, calling out in his sleep.

Forgael. [*In his sleep.*] That pale forehead, that hair the colour of burning.

First Sailor. Some crazy dream he is in, and believe me it is no crazier than the thought he has waking. He is not the first that has had the wits drawn out from him through shadows and fantasies.

Second Sailor. That is what ails him. I have been thinking it this good while.

First Sailor. Do you remember that galley we sank at the time of the full moon?

Second Sailor. I do. We were becalmed the same night, and he sat up there playing that old harp of his until the moon had set.

First Sailor. I was sleeping up there by the bulwark, and when I woke in the sound of the harp a change came over my eyes, and I could see very strange things. The dead were floating upon the sea yet, and it seemed as if the life that went out of every one of them had turned to the shape of a man-headed bird—grey they were, and they rose up of a sudden and called out with voices like our own, and flew away singing to the west. Words like this they were singing: 'Happiness beyond measure, happiness where the sun dies.'

Second Sailor. I understand well what they are doing. My mother used to be talking of birds of the sort. They are sent by the lasting watchers to lead men away from this world and its women to some place of shining women that cast no shadow, having lived before the making of the earth. But I have no mind to go following him to that place.

First Sailor. Let us creep up to him and kill him in his sleep.

Second Sailor. I would have made an end of him long ago, but that I was in dread of his harp. It is said that when he plays upon it he has power over all the listeners, with or without the body, seen or unseen, and any man that listens grows to be as mad as himself.

First Sailor. What way can he play it, being in his sleep?

Second Sailor. But who would be our captain then to make out a course from the Bear and the Polestar, and to bring us back home?

First Sailor. I have that thought out. We must have Aibric with us. He knows the constellations as well as Forgael. He is a good hand with the sword. Join with us; be our captain, Aibric. We are agreed to put an end to Forgael, before he wakes. There is no man but will be glad of it when it is done. Join with us, and you will have the captain's share and profit.

Aibric. Silence! for you have taken Forgael's pay.

First Sailor. Little pay we have had this twelvemonth. We would never have turned against him if he had brought us, as he promised, into seas that would be thick with ships. That was the bargain. What is the use of knocking about and fighting as we do unless we get the chance to drink more wine and kiss more women than lasting peaceable men through their long

lifetime? You will be as good a leader as ever he was
himself, if you will but join us.

Aibric. And do you think that I will join myself
To men like you, and murder him who has been
My master from my earliest childhood up?
No! nor to a world of men like you
When Forgael's in the other scale. Come! come!
I'll answer to more purpose when you have drawn
That sword out of its scabbard.

First Sailor. You have awaked him. We had best go,
for we have missed this chance. [SAILORS *go out.*

Forgael. Have the birds passed us? I could hear your
voice.
But there were others.

Aibric. I have seen nothing pass.

Forgael. You are certain of it? I never wake from
sleep
But that I am afraid they may have passed;
For they're my only pilots. I have not seen them
For many days, and yet there must be many
Dying at every moment in the world.

Aibric. They have all but driven you crazy, and
already
The sailors have been plotting for your death,
And all the birds have cried into your ears
Has lured you on to death.

Forgael. No; but they promised—

Aibric. I know their promises. You have told me all.
They are to bring you to unheard-of passion,
To some strange love the world knows nothing of,
Some ever-living woman as you think,
One that can cast no shadow, being unearthly.
But that 's all folly. Turn the ship about,

Sail home again, be some fair woman's friend;
Be satisfied to live like other men,
And drive impossible dreams away. The world
Has beautiful women to please every man.
Forgael. But he that gets their love after the fashion
Loves in brief longing and deceiving hope
And bodily tenderness, and finds that even
The bed of love, that in the imagination
Had seemed to be the giver of all peace,
Is no more than a wine-cup in the tasting,
And as soon finished.
Aibric. All that ever loved
Have loved that way—there is no other way.
Forgael. Yet never have two lovers kissed but they
Believed there was some other near at hand,
And almost wept because they could not find it.
Aibric. When they have twenty years; in middle life
They take a kiss for what a kiss is worth,
And let the dream go by.
Forgael. It's not a dream,
But the reality that makes our passion
As a lamp shadow—no—no lamp, the sun.
What the world's million lips are thirsting for,
Must be substantial somewhere.
Aibric. I have heard the Druids
Mutter such things as they awake from trance.
It may be that the dead have lit upon it,
Or those that never lived; no mortal can.
Forgael. I only of all living men shall find it.
Aibric. Then seek it in the habitable world,
Or leap into that sea and end a journey
That has no other end.
Forgael. I cannot answer.

I can see nothing plain; all 's mystery.
Yet, sometimes there 's a torch inside my head
That makes all clear, but when the light is gone
I have but images, analogies,
The mystic bread, the sacramental wine,
The red rose where the two shafts of the cross,
Body and soul, waking and sleep, death, life,
Whatever meaning ancient allegorists
Have settled on, are mixed into one joy.
For what 's the rose but that? miraculous cries,
Old stories about mystic marriages,
Impossible truths? But when the torch is lit
All that is impossible is certain,
I plunge in the abyss. [SAILORS *come in.*

First Sailor. Look there! there in the mist! A ship of spices.

Second Sailor. We would not have noticed her but for the sweet smell through the air. Ambergris and sandalwood, and all the herbs the witches bring from the sunrise.

First Sailor. No; but opoponax and cinnamon.

Forgael. [*Taking the tiller from* AIBRIC.] The ever-living have kept my bargain; they have paid you on the nail.

Aibric. Take up that rope to make her fast while we are plundering her.

First Sailor. There is a king on her deck and a queen. Where there is one woman it is certain there will be others.

Aibric. Speak lower or they'll hear.

First Sailor. They cannot hear; they are too much taken up with one another. Look! he has stooped down and kissed her on the lips.

Second Sailor. When she finds out we have as good men aboard she may not be too sorry in the end.

First Sailor. She will be as dangerous as a wild cat. These queens think more of the riches and the great name they get by marriage than of a ready hand and a strong body.

Second Sailor. There is nobody is natural but a robber. That is the reason the whole world goes tottering about upon its bandy legs.

Aibric. Run upon them now, and overpower the crew while yet asleep.

[SAILORS *and* AIBRIC *go out. The clashing of swords and confused voices are heard from the other ship, which cannot be seen because of the sail.*

Forgael. [*Who has remained at the tiller.*] There! there! They come! Gull, gannet, or diver,
But with a man's head, or a fair woman's.
They hover over the masthead awhile
To wait their friends, but when their friends have come
They'll fly upon that secret way of theirs,
One—and one—a couple—five together.
And now they all wheel suddenly and fly
To the other side, and higher in the air,
They've gone up thither, friend 's run up by friend;
They've gone to their beloved ones in the air,
In the waste of the high air, that they may wander
Among the windy meadows of the dawn.
But why are they still waiting? Why are they
Circling and circling over the masthead?
Ah! now they all look down—they'll speak of me
What the ever-living put into their minds,
And of that shadowless unearthly woman
At the world's end. I hear the message now.

But it's all mystery. There 's one that cries,
'From love and hate.' Before the sentence ends
Another breaks upon it with a cry,
'From love and death and out of sleep and waking.
And with the cry another cry is mixed,
'What can we do, being shadows?' All mystery,
And I am drunken with a dizzy light.
But why do they still hover overhead?
Why are you circling there? Why do you linger?
Why do you not run to your desire,
Now that you have happy winged bodies?
Being too busy in the air, and the high air,
They cannot hear my voice. But why that circling?

[*The* SAILORS *have returned.* DECTORA *is with them. She is dressed in pale green, with copper ornaments on her dress, and has a copper crown upon her head. Her hair is dull red.*

Forgael. [*Turning and seeing her.*] Why are you standing with your eyes upon me?
You are not the world's core. Oh no, no, no!
That cannot be the meaning of the birds.
You are not its core. My teeth are in the world,
But have not bitten yet.

Dectora. I am a queen,
And ask for satisfaction upon these
Who have slain my husband and laid hands upon me.

Forgael. I'd set my hopes on one that had no shadow:—
Where do you come from? who brought you to this place?
Why do you cast a shadow? Answer me that.

Dectora. Would that the storm that overthrew my ships,
And drowned the treasures of nine conquered nations,
And blew me hither to my lasting sorrow,

Had drowned me also. But, being yet alive,
I ask a fitting punishment for all
That raised their hands against him.
Forgael. There are some
That weigh and measure all in these waste seas—
They that have all the wisdom that's in life,
And all that prophesying images
Made of dim gold rave out in secret tombs;
They have it that the plans of kings and queens
Are dust on the moth's wing; that nothing matters
But laughter and tears—laughter, laughter and tears—
That every man should carry his own soul
Upon his shoulders.
Dectora. You've nothing but wild words,
And I would know if you would give me vengeance.
Forgael. When she finds out that I'll not let her go—
When she knows that.
Dectora. What is it that you are muttering—
That you'll not let me go? I am a queen.
Forgael. Although you are more beautiful than any,
I almost long that it were possible;
But if I were to put you on that ship,
With sailors that were sworn to do your will,
And you had spread a sail for home, a wind
Would rise of a sudden, or a wave so huge,
It had washed among the stars and put them out,
And beat the bulwark of your ship on mine,
Until you stood before me on the deck—
As now.
Dectora. Does wandering in these desolate seas
And listening to the cry of wind and wave
Bring madness?
Forgael. Queen, I am not mad.

Dectora. And yet you say the water and the wind
Would rise against me.
Forgael. No, I am not mad—
If it be not that hearing messages
From lasting watchers that outlive the moon
At the most quiet midnight is to be stricken.
Dectora. And did those watchers bid you take me captive?
Forgael. Both you and I are taken in the net.
It was their hands that plucked the winds awake
And blew you hither; and their mouths have promised
I shall have love in their immortal fashion.
They gave me that old harp of the nine spells
That is more mighty than the sun and moon,
Or than the shivering casting-net of the stars,
That none might take you from me.
Dectora. [*First trembling back from the mast where the harp is, and then laughing.*] For a moment
Your raving of a message and a harp
More mighty than the stars half troubled me.
But all that's raving. Who is there can compel
The daughter and grandaughter of a king
To be his bedfellow?
Forgael. Until your lips
Have called me their beloved, I'll not kiss them.
Dectora. My husband and my king died at my feet,
And yet you talk of love.
Forgael. The movement of time
Is shaken in these seas, and what one does
One moment has no might upon the moment
That follows after.
Dectora. I understand you now.
You have a Druid craft of wicked sound,

Wrung from the cold women of the sea—
A magic that can call a demon up,
Until my body give you kiss for kiss.
Forgael. Your soul shall give the kiss.
Dectora. I am not afraid,
While there's a rope to run into a noose
Or wave to drown. But I have done with words,
And I would have you look into my face
And know that it is fearless.
Forgael. Do what you will,
For neither I nor you can break a mesh
Of the great golden net that is about us.
Dectora. There's nothing in the world that's worth a fear.
[*She passes* FORGAEL *and stands for a moment looking into his face.*
I have good reason for that thought.
[*She runs suddenly on to the raised part of the poop.*
And now
I can put fear away as a queen should.
[*She mounts on the bulwark, and turns towards* FORGAEL.
Fool, fool! Although you have looked into my face
You did not see my purpose. I shall have gone
Before a hand can touch me.
Forgael. [*Folding his arms.*] My hands are still;
The ever-living hold us. Do what you will,
You cannot leap out of the golden net.
First Sailor. There is no need for you to drown. Give us our pardon and we will bring you home on your own ship, and make an end of this man that is leading us to death.
Dectora. I promise it.
Aibric. I am on his side.

I'd strike a blow for him to give him time
To cast his dreams away.

First Sailor. He has put a sudden darkness over the moon.

Dectora. Nine swords with handles of rhinoceros horn
To him that strikes him first!

First Sailor. I will strike him first. No! for that music of his might put a beast's head upon my shoulders, or it may be two heads and they devouring one another.

Dectora. I'll give a golden galley full of fruit
That has the heady flavour of new wine
To him that wounds him to the death.

First Sailor. I'll strike at him. His spells, when he dies, will die with him and vanish away.

Second Sailor. I'll strike at him.

The Others. And I! And I! And I!

[*Forgael plays upon the harp.*

First Sailor. [*Falling into a dream.*] It is what they are saying, there is some person dead in the other ship; we have to go and wake him. They did not say what way he came to his end, but it was sudden.

Second Sailor. You are right, you are right. We have to go to that wake.

Dectora. He has flung a Druid spell upon the air,
And set you dreaming.

Second Sailor. What way can we raise a keen, not knowing what name to call him by?

First Sailor. Come on to his ship. His name will come to mind in a moment. All I know is he died a thousand years ago, and was never yet waked.

Second Sailor. How can we wake him having no ale?

First Sailor. I saw a skin of ale aboard her—a pig-skin of brown ale.

Third Sailor. Come to the ale, a pigskin of brown ale, a goatskin of yellow!

First Sailor. [*Singing.*] Brown ale and yellow; yellow and brown ale; a goatskin of yellow!

All. [*Singing.*] Brown ale and yellow; yellow and brown ale! [SAILORS *go out.*

Dectora. Protect me now, gods, that my people swear by!

[AIBRIC *has risen from the ground where he had fallen. He has begun looking for his sword as if in a dream.*

Aibric. Where is my sword that fell out of my hand
When I first heard the news? Ah, there it is!

[*He goes dreamily towards the sword, but* DECTORA *runs at it and takes it up before he can reach it.*

Aibric. [*Sleepily.*] Queen, give it me.

Dectora. No, I have need of it.

Aibric. Why do you need a sword? But you may keep it,
Now that he 's dead I have no need of it,
For everything is gone.

A Sailor. [*Calling from the other ship.*] Come hither, Aibric,
And tell me who it is that we are waking.

Aibric. [*Half to* DECTORA, *half to himself.*] What name had that dead king? Arthur of Britain?
No, no—not Arthur. I remember now.
It was golden-armed Iollan, and he died
Brokenhearted, having lost his queen
Through wicked spells. That is not all the tale,
For he was killed. O! O! O! O! O! O!
For golden-armed Iollan has been killed.

[*He goes out. While he has been speaking, and through part of what follows, one hears the singing of the*

SAILORS *from the other ship.* DECTORA *stands with the sword lifted in front of* FORGAEL. *He changes the tune.*

Dectora. I will end all your magic on the instant.

[*Her voice becomes dreamy, and she lowers the sword slowly, and finally lets it fall. She spreads out her hair. She takes off her crown and lays it upon the deck.*

The sword is to lie beside him in the grave.
It was in all his battles. I will spread my hair,
And wring my hands, and wail him bitterly,
For I have heard that he was proud and laughing,
Blue-eyed, and a quick runner on bare feet,
And that he died a thousand years ago.
O! O! O!

[FORGAEL *changes the tune.*]

But no, that is not it.
I knew him well, and while I heard him laughing
They killed him at my feet. O! O! O! O!
For golden-armed Iollan that I loved.
But what is it that made me say I loved him?
It was that harper put it in my thoughts,
But it is true. Why did they run upon him,
And beat the golden helmet with their swords?

Forgael. Do you not know me, lady? I am he
That you are weeping for.

Dectora. No, for he is dead.
O! O! O! for golden-armed Iollan.

Forgael. It was so given out, but I will prove
That the grave-diggers in a dreamy frenzy
Have buried nothing but my golden arms.
Listen to that low-laughing string of the moon
And you will recollect my face and voice,

For you have listened to me playing it
These thousand years.

[*He starts up, listening to the birds. The harp slips from his hands, and remains leaning against the bulwarks behind him.*

What are the birds at there?
Why are they all a-flutter of a sudden?
What are you calling out above the mast?
If railing and reproach and mockery
Because I have awakened her to love
By magic strings, I'll make this answer to it:
Being driven on by voices and by dreams
That were clear messages from the ever-living,
I have done right. What could I but obey?
And yet you make a clamour of reproach.

Dectora. [*Laughing.*] Why, it's a wonder out of reckoning
That I should keen him from the full of the moon
To the horn, and he be hale and hearty.

Forgael. How have I wronged her now that she is merry?
But no, no, no! your cry is not against me.
You know the councils of the ever-living,
And all the tossing of your wings is joy,
And all that murmuring 's but a marriage song;
But if it be reproach, I answer this:
There is not one among you that made love
By any other means. You call it passion,
Consideration, generosity;
But it was all deceit, and flattery
To win a woman in her own despite,
For love is war, and there is hatred in it;
And if you say that she came willingly—

Dectora. Why do you turn away and hide your face,
That I would look upon for ever?
Forgael. My grief.
Dectora. Have I not loved you for a thousand years?
Forgael. I never have been golden-armed Iollan.
Dectora. I do not understand. I know your face
Better than my own hands.
Forgael. I have deceived you
Out of all reckoning.
Dectora. Is it not true
That you were born a thousand years ago,
In islands where the children of Aengus wind
In happy dances under a windy moon,
And that you'll bring me there?
Forgael. I have deceived you;
I have deceived you utterly.
Dectora. How can that be?
Is it that though your eyes are full of love
Some other woman has a claim on you,
And I've but half?
Forgael. Oh, no!
Dectora. And if there is,
If there be half a hundred more, what matter?
I'll never give another thought to it;
No, no, nor half a thought; but do not speak.
Women are hard and proud and stubborn-hearted,
Their heads being turned with praise and flattery;
And that is why their lovers are afraid
To tell them a plain story.
Forgael. That 's not the story;
But I have done so great a wrong against you,
There is no measure that it would not burst.
I will confess it all.

Dectora. What do I care,
Now that my body has begun to dream,
And you have grown to be a burning coal
In the imagination and intellect?
If something that 's most fabulous were true—
If you had taken me by magic spells,
And killed a lover or husband at my feet—
I would not let you speak, for I would know
That it was yesterday and not to-day
I loved him; I would cover up my ears,
As I am doing now. [*A pause.*] Why do you weep?

Forgael. I weep because I've nothing for your eyes
But desolate waters and a battered ship.

Dectora. Oh, why do you not lift your eyes to mine?

Forgael. I weep—I weep because bare night 's above,
And not a roof of ivory and gold.

Dectora. I would grow jealous of the ivory roof,
And strike the golden pillars with my hands.
I would that there was nothing in the world
But my beloved—that night and day had perished,
And all that is and all that is to be,
All that is not the meeting of our lips.

Forgael. Why do you turn your eyes upon bare night?
Am I to fear the waves, or is the moon
My enemy?

Dectora. I looked upon the moon,
Longing to knead and pull it into shape
That I might lay it on your head as a crown.
But now it is your thoughts that wander away,
For you are looking at the sea. Do you not know
How great a wrong it is to let one's thought
Wander a moment when one is in love?

[*He has moved away. She follows him. He is looking out over the sea, shading his eyes.*

Dectora. Why are you looking at the sea?
Forgael. Look there!
There where the cloud creeps up upon the moon.
Dectora. What is there but a troop of ash-grey birds
That fly into the west?
[*The scene darkens, but there is a ray of light upon the figures.*
Forgael. But listen, listen!
Dectora. What is there but the crying of the birds?
Forgael. If you'll but listen closely to that crying
You'll hear them calling out to one another
With human voices.
Dectora. Clouds have hid the moon.
The birds cry out, what can I do but tremble?
Forgael. They have been circling over our heads in the air,
But now that they have taken to the road
We have to follow, for they are our pilots;
They're crying out. Can you not hear their cry?—
'There is a country at the end of the world
Where no child's born but to outlive the moon.'
[*The* SAILORS *come in with* AIBRIC. *They carry torches.*
Aibric. We have lit upon a treasure that's so great
Imagination cannot reckon it.
The hold is full—boxes of precious spice,
Ivory images with amethyst eyes,
Dragons with eyes of ruby. The whole ship
Flashes as if it were a net of herrings.
Let us return to our own country, Forgael,
And spend it there. Have you not found this queen?
What more have you to look for on the seas?
Forgael. I cannot—I am going on to the end.
As for this woman, I think she is coming with me.

Aibric. Speak to him, lady, and bid him turn the ship.
He knows that he is taking you to death;
He cannot contradict me.
Dectora. Is that true?
Forgael. I do not know for certain.
Dectora. Carry me
To some sure country, some familiar place.
Have we not everything that life can give
In having one another?
Forgael. How could I rest
If I refused the messengers and pilots
With all those sights and all that crying out?
Dectora. I am a woman, I die at every breath.
Aibric. [*To the* SAILORS.] To the other ship, for there 's no help in words,
And I will follow you and cut the rope
When I have said farewell to this man here,
For neither I nor any living man
Will look upon his face again.
[SAILORS *go out, leaving one torch perhaps in a torch-holder on the bulwark.*
Forgael. [*To* DECTORA.] Go with him,
For he will shelter you and bring you home.
Aibric. [*Taking* FORGAEL'S *hand.*] I'll do it for his sake.
Dectora. No. Take this sword
And cut the rope, for I go on with Forgael.
Aibric. Farewell! Farewell!
[*He goes out. The light grows stronger.*
Dectora. The sword is in the rope—
The rope 's in two—it falls into the sea,
It whirls into the foam. O ancient worm,
Dragon that loved the world and held us to it,

You are broken, you are broken. The world drifts away,
And I am left alone with my beloved,
Who cannot put me from his sight for ever.
We are alone for ever, and I laugh,
Forgael, because you cannot put me from you.
The mist has covered the heavens, and you and I
Shall be alone for ever. We two—this crown—
I half remember. It has been in my dreams.
Bend lower, O king, that I may crown you with it.
O flower of the branch, O bird among the leaves,
O silver fish that my two hands have taken
Out of the running stream, O morning star,
Trembling in the blue heavens like a white fawn
Upon the misty border of the wood,
Bend lower, that I may cover you with my hair,
For we will gaze upon this world no longer.

[*The harp begins to burn as with fire.*

Forgael. [*Gathering* DECTORA'S *hair about him.*]
Beloved, having dragged the net about us,
And knitted mesh to mesh, we grow immortal;
And that old harp awakens of itself
To cry aloud to the grey birds, and dreams,
That have had dreams for father, live in us.

NOTES

NOTES.

Deirdre.

Deirdre, like the other plays in this book, has been altered many times after performance, till at last I had come to think I had put all my knowledge into it and could not, apart from the always incalculable pleasure good playing brings, look for greater pleasure than it had already given me. But now because of Mr. Craig's scene which is fitted to so many moods and actions, and makes possible natural and expressive light and shade, I have begun to alter it again and to find in this a new excitement. Sooner or later it will be tried at the Abbey Theatre with what is, I believe, a new stage effect. The barbarous dark-faced men, who have not hitherto been all I imagined (perhaps because our stage is shallow), will not show themselves directly to the eyes when they pass the door, nor will the dark-faced messenger when he comes and says that supper 's ready, nor it may be Conchubar when he comes to spy and not to fight. I will see passing shadows and standing shadows only. Perhaps the light that casts them may grow blood-red as the sun sets, but of that I am not sure. I have tried these shadows upon the stage and thought them impressive, but as I have not tried them before an audience I leave the old directions for the present. Should these shadows become a permanent part of the representation I will have to abandon the windows and doors through which one sees at present a wood and evening sky. But, perhaps, shadows of leaves seen on the wall beside the door under a shifting light will accompany the Musician's long opening speech.

Should these effects become permanent, some slight changes in the text will be necessary. I record them here partly for my own use and that of my players.

On page 20, after 'Should I be less than Conchubar, being a man?' I will insert these two speeches—

'*Deirdre.* There, there upon the wall.
Naisi. Could he find none
But a dark skin and Libyan axe to face me?'

And on page 23 after 'and drive the shadows out' instead of 'For day's grey end comes up.—Make no sad music' read—

'*First Musician.* The sconces are all empty.
Deirdre. If the sun
Now that he fades must need call shadows up,
Call them with sound but sound it airily.'

and then go on 'What is it but a king and queen at chess?' as before.

If the play be played in this way the dark men when they enter with the king bring torches, but I may let the king enter as at present when he comes to spy, the shadow of fear become a substance at last, for the passing of the second musician across the stage holding her torch has dramatic value.

Deirdre was first played at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, on November 24, 1906, with following cast:—

Musicians	Miss Sara Allgood Miss Maire O'Neill Miss Brigit O'Dempsey
Fergus, *an old man*	Arthur Sinclair
Naisi, *a young king*	F. J. Fay
Deirdre, *his queen*	Miss Darragh
A Dark-faced Messenger	U. Wright
Conchubar	J. M. Kerrigan
Dark-faced Executioner	A. Power

Since then the principal part has been taken by Miss Mona Limerick, Miss Sara Allgood and Miss Maire O'Neill; and by Mrs. Patrick Campbell who played it in Dublin and London with the Abbey Company in 1907 and 1908, as well as playing it with a company of her own in London in the Autumn of 1907.

The Green Helmet.

A prose version of this play called *The Golden Helmet* was produced at the Abbey Theatre on March 19, 1908, and the present version on February 10, 1910, when Mr. Kerrigan took the part of Cuchulain and Mr. Sinclair and Mr. O'Donovan those of Conall and Laegaire respectively. Miss Allgood, Miss O'Neill and Miss Magee were the three queens.

In performance we left the black hands to the imagination, and probably when there is so much noise and movement on the stage they would always fail to produce any effect. Our stage is too small to try the experiment, for they would be hidden by the figures of the players. We staged the play with a very pronounced colour-scheme, and I have noticed that the more obviously decorative is the scene and costuming of any play, the more it is lifted out of time and place, and the nearer to faeryland do we carry it. One gets also much more effect out of concerted movements—above all, if there are many players—when all the clothes are the same colour. No breadth of treatment gives monotony when there is movement and change of lighting. It concentrates attention on every new effect and makes every change of outline or of light and shadow surprising and delightful. Because of this one can use contrasts of colour, between clothes and background or in the background itself, the complementary colours for instance, which would be too obvious to keep the attention in a painting. One wishes to make the movement of the action as important as possible, and the simplicity which gives depth of colour does this, just as, for precisely similar reasons, the lack of colour in a statue fixes the attention upon the form.

On Baile's Strand.

On Baile's Strand was first played, in a version considerably different from the present, on December 27, 1904, at the opening of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, and with the following cast:—

Cuchulain	F. J. Fay
Conchubar	George Roberts
Daire *(an old King not now in the play)*	G. MacDonald
The Blind Man . . .	Seumus O'Sullivan
The Fool	William Fay
The Young Man . . .	P. MacShiubhlaigh

The old and young kings were played by the following:—R. Nash, A. Power, U. Wright, E. Keegan, Emma Vernon, Miss Garvey, Dora Gunning, Sara Allgood. It was necessary to put women into men's parts owing to the smallness of our company at that time.

The play was revived by the National Theatre Society, Ltd., in a somewhat altered version at Oxford, Cambridge, and London a few months later. I then entirely rewrote it up to the entrance of the Young Man, and changed it a good deal from that on to the end, and this new version was played at the Abbey Theatre for the first time in April, 1906.

The King's Threshold.

The King's Threshold was first played October 7, 1903, in the Molesworth Hall, Dublin, by the Irish National Theatre Society, and with the following cast:—

Seanchan	F. J. Fay
King Guaire	P. Kelly
Lord High Chamberlain	Seumus O'Sullivan
Soldier	William Conroy
Monk	S. Sheridan-Neill
Mayor	William Fay
A Cripple	Patrick Colum
A Court Lady	Honor Lavelle
Another Court Lady	Dora Melville
A Princess	Sara Allgood
Another Princess	Dora Gunning
Fedelm	Maire ni Shiubhlaigh
A Servant	P. MacShiubhlaigh
Another Servant	P. Josephs
A Pupil	G. Roberts
Another Pupil	Cartia MacCormac

It has been revised a good many times since then and although the play has not been changed in the radical structure, the parts of the Mayor, Servant, and Cripple are altogether new, and the rest is altered here and there. It was written when our Society was begining its fight for the recognition of pure art in a community of which one half is buried in the practical affairs of life, and the other half in politics and a propagandist patriotism.

The Shadowy Waters.

The first version of *The Shadowy Waters* was first performed on January 14, 1904, in the Molesworth Hall, Dublin, with the following players in the principal parts:—Forgael, F. J. Fay; Aibric, Seumus O'Sullivan; Dectora, Maire ni Shiubhlaigh.

Its production was an accident, for in the first instance I had given it to the company that they might have some practice in the speaking of my sort of blank verse until I had a better play finished. It played badly enough from the point of view of any ordinary playgoer, but pleased many of my friends; and as I had been in America when it was produced, I got it played again privately, and gave it to Miss Farr for a Theosophical Convention, that I might discover how to make a better play of it. I then completely rewrote it in the form that it has in the text of this book, but this version had once again to be condensed and altered for its production in Dublin, 1906. Mr. Sinclair took the part of Aibric, and Miss Darragh that of Dectora, while Mr. Frank Fay was Forgael as before. It owed a considerable portion of what success it met with both in its new and old form to a successful colour scheme and to dreamy movements and intonations on the part of the players. The scenery for its performance in 1906 was designed by Mr. Robert Gregory.

The Hour-Glass.

The Hour-Glass was first played in The Molesworth Hall, Dublin, on March 14, 1903, with the following cast:—Wise Man, Mr. T. Dudley Digges; His Wife, Miss M. T. Quinn; The Fool, Mr. F. J. Fay; Pupils, Messrs. P. J. Kelly, P. Colum, C. C. Caufield. It has since become a regular part of the répertoire of the Abbey Company.

Up till the present year we always played it in front of an olive-green curtain, and dressed the Wise Man and his Pupils in various shades of purple (with a little green here and there); and because in all these decorative schemes, which are based on colour, one needs, I think, a third colour subordinate to the

other two, we dressed the Fool in red-brown, and put touches of red-brown in the Wife's dress and painted the chair and desk the same colour. Last winter, however, we revived the play with costumes taken chiefly from designs by Mr. Gordon Craig, and with the screens he has shown us how to make and use, arranged as in the drawing in this book, and with effects that depend but little on colour, and greatly upon delicate changes of tone. The Fool was dressed as in Mr. Craig's drawing, but he advised us against using the mask till he was able to see to the making of it himself. The same Fool and mask, the Fat Fool of folk-lore who is 'as wide and wild as a hill' and not the Thin Fool of modern romance, may go with a masked Blind Man into *On Baile's Strand*.

CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN.

MY DEAR LADY GREGORY,—

When I was a boy I used to wander about at Rosses Point and Ballisodare listening to old songs and stories. I wrote down what I heard and made poems out of the stories or put them into the little chapters of the first edition of *The Celtic Twilight*, and that is how I began to write in the Irish way.

Then I went to London to make my living, and though I spent a part of every year in Ireland and tried to keep the old life in my memory by reading every country tale I could find in books or old newspapers, I began to forget the true countenance of country life. The old tales were still alive for me indeed, but with a new, strange, half-unreal life, as if in a wizard's glass, until at last, when I had finished *The Secret Rose*, and was half-way through *The Wind Among the Reeds*, a wise woman in her trance told me that my inspiration was from the moon, and that I should always live close to water, for my work was getting too full of those little jewelled thoughts that come from the sun and have no nation. I had no need to turn to my books of astrology to know that the common people are under the moon, or to Porphyry to remember the image-making power of the waters. Nor did I doubt the entire truth of what she said to me,

for my head was full of fables that I had no longer the knowledge and emotion to write. Then you brought me with you to see your friends in the cottages, and to talk to old wise men on Slieve Echtge, and we gathered together, or you gathered for me, a great number of stories and traditional beliefs. You taught me to understand again, and much more perfectly than before, the true countenance of country life.

One night I had a dream almost as distinct as a vision, of a cottage where there was well-being and firelight and talk of a marriage, and into the midst of that cottage there came an old woman in a long cloak. She was Ireland herself, that Cathleen ni Houlihan for whom so many songs have been sung and about whom so many stories have been told and for whose sake so many have gone to their death. I thought if I could write this out as a little play I could make others see my dream as I had seen it, but I could not get down out of that high window of dramatic verse, and in spite of all you had done for me I had not the country speech. One has to live among the people, like you, of whom an old man said in my hearing, 'She has been a serving-maid among us,' before one can think the thoughts of the people and speak with their tongue. We turned my dream into the little play, *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, and when we gave it to the little theatre in Dublin and found that the working-people liked it, you helped me to put my other dramatic fables into speech. Some of these have already been acted, but some may not be acted for a long time, but all seem to me, though they were but a part of a summer's work, to have more of that countenance of country life than anything I have done since I was a boy.

Feb., 1903. W. B. YEATS.

This play was first played on April 2, 1902, in St. Teresa's Hall, Dublin, with the following cast:—Cathleen, Miss Maude Gonne; Delia Cahel, Miss Maire nic Sheublagh; Bridget Gillan, Miss M. T. Quinn; Patrick Gillan, Mr. C. Caufield; Michael Gillan, Mr. T. Dudley Digges; Peter Gillan, Mr. W. G. Fay.

Miss Maude Gonne played very finely, and her great height made Cathleen seem a divine being fallen into our mortal infirmity. Since then the part has been twice played in America by women who insisted on keeping their young faces, and one of these when she came to the door dropped her cloak, as I have been told, and showed a white satin dress embroidered with shamrocks. Upon another—or was it the same occasion?—the player of Bridget wore a very becoming dress of the time of Louis the Fourteenth. The most beautiful woman of her time, when she played my Cathleen, 'made up' centuries old, and never should the part be played but with a like sincerity. This was the first play of our Irish School of folk-drama, and in it that way of quiet movement and careful speech which has given our players some little fame first showed itself, arising partly out of deliberate opinion and partly out of the ignorance of the players. Does art owe most to ignorance or to knowledge? Certainly it comes to its deathbed full of knowledge. I cannot imagine this play, or any folk-play of our school, acted by players with no knowledge of the peasant, and of the awkwardness and stillness of bodies that have followed the plough, or too lacking in humility to copy these things without convention or caricature.

The lines beginning 'Do not make a great keening' and 'They shall be remembered for ever' are said or sung to an air heard by one of the players in a dream.

The Legendary and Mythological Foundation of the Plays.

The greater number of the stories I have used, and persons I have spoken of, are in Lady Gregory's *Gods and Fighting Men* and *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*. If my small Dublin audience for poetical drama grows to any size, whether now or at some future time, I shall owe it to these two books, masterpieces of prose, which can but make the old stories as familiar to Irishmen at anyrate as are the stories of Arthur and his Knights to all readers of books. I cannot believe that it is from friendship that

I weigh these books with Malory, and feel no discontent at the tally, or that it is the wish to make the substantial origin of my own art familiar, that would make me give them before all other books to young men and girls in Ireland. I wrote for the most part before they were written, but all, or all but all, is there.

The foundations of *Deirdre* and of *On Baile's Strand* are stories called respectively the 'Fate of the Sons of Usnach' and 'The Son of Aoife' in *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*. *The Green Helmet* is founded upon an old Irish story, *The Feast of Bricriu*, given in that work also, and is meant as an introduction to *On Baile's Strand*.

The King's Threshold is founded upon a middle-Irish story of the demands of the poets at the Court of King Guaire of Gort, but I have twisted it about and revised its moral that the poet might have the best of it. It owes something to a play on the same subject by my old friend Mr. Edwin Ellis, who heard the story from me and wrote of it long ago.

I took the Aengus and Edain of *The Shadowy Waters* from poor translations of the various Aengus stories, which, new translated by Lady Gregory, make up so much of what is most beautiful in both her books. They had, however, so completely become a part of my own thought that in 1897, when I was still working on an early version of *The Shadowy Waters*, I saw one night with my bodily eyes, as it seemed, two beautiful persons, who would, I believe, have answered to those names. The plot of the play itself has, however, no definite old story for its foundation, but was woven to a very great extent out of certain visionary experiences.

The Hour-Glass is founded upon a story—*The Priest's Soul*—recorded by Lady Wilde in *Ancient Legends of Ireland*, 1887, vol. i., pp. 60-67.

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